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TORONTO
FILM
SOCIETY

OCT 1 1978

Cover:

Marie-Anne looks in a mirror as Anthony Hall reflects on **Getting It Right**: the facts of Canadian history as they are appearing in our current cinema. See page 14.

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REVERB

Correction

I would like to correct what I feel to be mis-statements of fact concerning the Canada Council's relationship with the Coopérative des Cinéastes Indépendants, as described by M. Claude Chamberland in the article "Craziness Paying Off" in Cinéma Canada No. 46.

While I cannot deny M. Chamberland's obvious commitment to the dissemination of 16mm. independent film, his statements regarding Council policy toward his organization do not seem to coincide with notes taken at meetings with M. Chamberland or with detailed letters explaining Council's position.

In 1957, the Canada Council withdrew support from the Coopérative because it was felt that the Co-op's inability to provide any kind of audited statement, along with their deficitary financial situation, reflected inadequate management of the Co-op. But, when told that the Coopérative could not afford an accountant to prepare an audited statement, Council offered to provide funds for that purpose. Apparently, though, their financial affairs were such that they were unable to take advantage of our offer.

Later, in July, 1977, when Cinéma Parallèle was incorporated, M. Chamberland returned to Council asking for operational funding as a new organization. He was told that a new organization might be considered for modest special project funding after at least six months of operation; but, since funding had originally been withdrawn from the Co-op because of what was perceived as weak financial management, Council felt that the least it could ask for was one full year of sound management. After such a year, a balanced, audited statement reflecting no deficit would offer proof of their budgetary responsibility, and the Coopérative could then be considered for Council funding once more.

Through its Explorations programme, the Canada Council has recently supported the Cinéma Parallèle's "Rétrospective du Cinéma Indépendant canadien", and we remain ready to assist the Coopérative in the future should it be able to comply with our policies and criteria for sound financial management.

Françoise Picard
Canada Council

A Last Ditch Effort

The Toronto Filmmakers Co-operative has been helping independent filmmakers since its inception in 1971. An unfortunate case of mismanagement has recently brought the Co-op to the brink of bankruptcy. We are currently negotiating with the major creditors and the funding agencies in a last ditch effort to try to save this organization, which has more than proven its worth over the years. Hundreds of aspiring filmmakers have been assisted by the Co-op through a very impressive workshop program, post production facilities at reduced rates, film production advice from script to screen, lab discounts, and a job placement program. As an information and energy centre in its role as a common meeting ground for young Toronto independents, the Co-op fulfills a much needed function. The new executive board is hard at work trying to correct the mistakes of the past. We urgently need letters of support from the film community, if we are to survive. Please mail them to the Toronto Filmmakers Co-op, 67 Portland Street, Toronto, Ont. M5V 2M9. Also, you may contact your MP or the major funding agencies directly. Every letter and phone call or telegram helps. The Co-op is very grateful for all the support it has received so far from Toronto's film community. You may call (416) 366-3005 to offer further assistance.

Thanks,
George Csaba Koller

Our Riel Apologies

The following letter was received for Paul Kelman.

Dear Paul;

Saw the interview in Cinema Canada and, despite the shock of seeing my photograph identified as someone else and the other error with captions, I wanted to drop you a note to say what an excellent piece of work you did in making clear sense out of our long and rambling conversation.

It was refreshing to read something on the controversial Riel film written with such objectivity and with enthu-

siasm that pictures like this are starting to be produced here.

Thanks again, Paul and best of luck.

Roy Moore

Some errors which editors make are worse than others. Using wrong names in captions is one of the worst. We extend our apologies, both to Roy Moore and to Paul Kelman. Ed.

A Pleased Reader

The following letter came to us, addressed to Jaan Pill.

Dear Jaan:

I picked up a copy of Cinema Canada in the local bookstore and was pleased to see your article on Television Commercial Competitions.

Paul and I enjoyed reading it and both agreed that it was a very fair and objective commentary — not attributes that can always be ascribed to the media. One minor correction — the top 30 is selected on the basis of the combined scores from the initial and final judging, not just the final judging.

The 1978 competition is basically the same as in previous years although a few refinements have been made. If you want to sit in on another session let me know and I will send you the timetable.

Les Jones
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August 1978/5

to be a writer: write!

Anne Cameron's career has been studded with breakthroughs, awards and acclaim. But the plot of this success story has not always run smoothly. Anne talks about what it takes to face success alone and most of all, what it takes to continue writing.

by Jim Erickson

Given a chance, Anne Cameron better known as Cam, will relate the story of Bonny Prince Charlie, the Grahams and her family the Camerons, the castles and the kings, who fought whom, how many died, and where they are buried. In ten minutes she can take you from fourteenth century Scotland to the early twentieth century coal mines of Nanaimo, accounting for her family most of the way.

Cam was born, raised and educated in Nanaimo. Except for a few years of "getting away to find herself," she has always lived on Vancouver Island — currently in Harewood, part of Nanaimo. What was once an area of small farms where coal miners scratched out an existence above and below the ground is now an area rezoned for apartments, condominiums and houses that all look alike. Cam's is of an older vintage — before rezoning. Until a couple of months ago she cooked on oil and burned wood in a Franklin Stove for heat. In and around these four green walls exist a collection of kids, cats, dogs and plants, all coming and going as things of such nature do. Only the plants and Cam are relatively stationary: she at her typewriter and they in whatever receptacle she has plopped them into. Bookshelves line every wall in the living room, every shelf is full to overflowing, and the overflow goes into boxes and bags on the floor. Her input of the written word is matched only by her output.

"I always wanted to be a *writer*! I knew from my working-class upbringing that I had to have a job to survive, but it seemed as if there was nothing but dreary jobs available for women.

"I didn't write much when the kids were little because I didn't have to write. I was totally into being their mother and every doubt I had was answered by cuddles and jammy kisses. It was about the time the youngest started kindergarten and our adopted daughter died that all the horrors came crawling out of the closet; cuddles didn't answer the questions anymore, and the kids had so well learned my 'independence lessons' they didn't 'need' me. Too, the shock and grief of the baby dying shook every value and answer I thought I had. Having worked with and seen firsthand the psychiatrists

and psychologists, I had no faith in them at all — still have no faith in them. So I started to find answers inside myself."

At first the answers took the form of poetry: making the written word say what she was hearing inside herself and in the world around her. Also, at that time, she and Jacques Hubert (who is part Indian) were involved with the Non Status Indian Organization. She became obsessed with the Indian culture and concerned with the plight of Canadian Natives living in white man's society. Firsthand experiences with bigotry and discrimination compelled her to make some sort of statement. The result was *Windigo*, a collection of dramatic poems.

"Windigo: The white man's dictionary defines Windigo as a cannibalistic spirit who roamed the earth in search of prey. The Indians say that Windigo didn't exist before the white man came."

Hagan Beggs mounted a production of *Windigo* at the Matsqui Penitentiary, using native inmates as actors. It won first prize in the B.C. Centennial Play Competition.

In the summer of 1972, with the big success and a desire to do more dramatic writing, Cam scraped the money together to spend ten weeks at the Banff School of Fine Arts. There, gasping for air at 7000 feet, she worked with George Ryga.

"Ryga made me stop grinning that shithouse grin and apologizing by my tone of voice when I said, 'I'm a poet'. He hammered into me the supreme law of How To Be A Writer: WRITE! He told me the only way I would ever be satisfied with what I was writing would be if I reached down into my guts and told the truth. He didn't tell me a whole hell of a lot that I didn't already know, but he made me know it. To say I loved that guy would be a supreme understatement. He also told me to go back to what I had grown up with, find my identity and that's what I'm doing."

The next two years were spent almost totally submerged in Indian culture. As a founding member of the Tillicum Theatre, a theatre group of young Native Canadians, Cam put most of her efforts into creating pieces for their productions. She adapted many legends for the stage and wrote *The Twin Sinks of Allen Sammy*, a one-act play depicting the reality of a young Indian couple living off the reserve. The Tillicum Theatre provided the contact and confidence of the Indian People. She "kept her mouth shut and her eyes and ears open" and tried to transfer to paper what she was observing.

Jim Erickson is a free-lance writer who also works for CBC-TV in Vancouver...

"What I do is listen with my inner ear to the music... the songs, the feelings; then I get the old people to tell me, in their own words, what the song is saying, why it is sung, who sang it. Then I try to catch the sense of it and put it into English without hammering it into false, externally imposed, European rhyme or rhythm structure."

The heron stands on a rock, watching
the night walk on water,
in a secret place an old man
prays, holding warm the memory of
a good woman gone too soon.
In a secret place an old man
prays, waiting for the snow.
In a secret place an old man
prays, thankful for the sun,
in a secret place an old man
prays
on the wharf
talking while the young men listen.



In the summer of 1973, Canadian film director Daryl Duke was looking for young Indians for his television film *I Heard The Owl Call My Name*. Cam and Jacques rounded up the members of the Tillicum Theatre and sat them on their living room floor along with the kids, cats, dogs and plants, and everyone auditioned. Three or four of the young people were cast. When the production started Jacques, because of his contacts with the Indians, was asked to help. Cam stayed by her typewriter and finished a film script on Maquinna, Chief of the Nootka when Captain Cook first landed at Friendly Cove. She handed it to Daryl. He liked it and asked for more.

Daryl "took the greenness" out of Cam's writing. He would tell her he had the rights to such and such a book and ask for a script. She would do one and he would criticize it. He showed her how scripts should look physically when submit-

ting them. Eventually some development money was found for a few of the things she did; for the first time, she was making money by her writing. "It felt good. For the first time people began to believe what I always knew; I was a writer."

She wrote *You'll Understand When You're Older* in the summer of 1974. The play draws from her immediate past; the places, events and people are from her back yard. It is "a sensitive study of the change of values." Maggy MacDonald, ten years old, is trying to cope with her changing self, a war in Europe, why boys can fight and girls can't, and why she can't live with her mother, who is living with, but not married to, a man not Maggy's father. "Here Lass, the part you don't understand now will make sense later."

A production of *You'll Understand When You're Older* was mounted by the Tillicum Theatre in early 1975. "The director cast from the streets. He found Hugh singing country and western songs in a bar, and Grandpa on a half-built sailboat in the Nanaimo Harbor." The play won the Best Original Play award in the BCDA Upper Island Play Festival.

By then Cam was living in Tahsis, a small mill town on the west coast of Vancouver Island. Husband Jacques was managing a trucking company, while she and a friend owned and operated a small delivery service. "We'd meet the boat in the middle of the night, rain pissin' down our necks, and deliver beer to the pub and the liquor store. The cases weren't so bad but the kegs were a bitch." Under the clatter of rain on the trailerhouse roof she completed *Rites of Passage*.

And success came, with *Rites...* winning the New Play Centre's Women's Year Play Award.

Having the courage to face success alone, Cam separated from her husband Jacques, whom she once referred to as "my best friend." She explains "His ego couldn't tolerate my success — the independence it brought me. He became lonely and threatened because he couldn't understand what I wanted to do and didn't understand the dues you have to pay to create."

"There are times in women's lives when we pass, almost predictably, through an empty land devoid of guidelines or signposts. We have to learn to venture out of the nest, then build our own, and finally to live in a nest once crowded, now private. We have to learn to leave our parents and, even harder, to allow our children to leave us. We have to learn to live alone, learn to have courage to fail. Hardest of all, we have to learn who we are."

Rites of Passage borrows Maggy the daughter, Beth the mother, and Bess the grandmother from *You'll Understand When You're Older*. The emphasis is taken away from Maggy to give the three equal billing. While *You'll Understand...* is about the confusion of growing up, *Rites of Passage* recognizes the reality of each woman in her specific environment. Cam takes the haunting black images of the coal mine and twists them into cries for womanhood. Maggy says, after relating a story of the blind pit-ponies; "Sometimes I feel I'm being bitten, bitten until there won't be anything left of me but my eyes... Just my eyes, all dried up, not even tears left..." Beth, the mother, tells the story of her dad's coal scars, then asks; "But who sees my scars? Who knows the dark hole I cut for myself and crawled into? Who knows what I've seen in the blackness behind my closed eyelids?" The play is a study of the inequities of today's society, the injustices of yesterday's, and the hope for tomorrow's.

Response to *Rites of Passage* was positive but outside of the New Play Centre's production, there was relatively little

action. Cam was still living in Tahsis, where only her typing competed with the rain on "that goddam aluminum can". A friend, passing through Toronto dropped a copy of *Rites...* on the desk of Peter Lower, then a story editor for CBC-TV drama. A few days later Cam received a phone call from Toronto which told her they were very interested, made some suggestions, said a check was in the mail, and asked for a second draft. She whipped off the second draft, plus a first draft of *Dreamspeaker*. The CBC brought her out to Toronto to do some more work on *Rites...*, suggesting she do this and that and omit such and such. "I said fine, that sounds like an interesting story but it doesn't have a whole hell-of-a-lot to do with Maggy MacDonald or *Rites of Passage*. Find somebody else to write yours for you." She took all four of her rewrites home, quite sure her career with the CBC was over before it began.

"Some people say I'm hard to work with, some are scared of me. Christ! I'm petrified of them all but I won't be buried."

Ralph Thomas was looking for material to fill his *For the Record* series. He liked *Dreamspeaker*. Claude Jutra liked and wanted to direct it. They brought Cam out to work on that script. This time they came up with a shooting script and while everybody and everything was in Montreal for the Olympics, a small crew shot *Dreamspeaker* on the west coast.

"I never believed I would see it. Even when it was in the can I wouldn't believe it would make it to the screen."

"*Dreamspeaker*", says Tony Reif of Vancouver's Pacific Cinematheque, "is really a fable about the golden age, the lost time before the world became an object and people merely manipulators and manipulated. Reasonableness, action based on rational induction, on observed cause and effect — this is what the film attacks as the product of our alienated and alienating consciousness. To live in this world, love between people is essential, because everything is felt so much more deeply. Without love, says *Dreamspeaker*, we will perish."

When Cam wrote *Dreamspeaker*, a native Indian boy was living with them. She became outraged at the "bureaucratic bullshit" that created this confused, complex, often violent person: "They take a ten-year-old boy from Alert Bay who has just seen his alcoholic mother choke to death on her own puke, put him in a foster home in Vancouver and expect him to stay? It's two different realities."

She was also experiencing the mystifying behavior of her own children. Why do the moments of absolute non-communication exist between the parent and child? Can love be the panacea? It seems it was so in the "golden age"; can it be so in today's society?

Her next major project was *A Matter of Choice*, another *For the Record* film. It is the account of a rape and its immediate psychological after effects. The rapist is not the notorious half crazed, greasy hunchback hiding in the bushes; he is the more common but seldom prosecuted 'friend', the one who invites a woman up to his apartment for a drink, gets carried away, thinks the woman is "playing hard to get" and violently rapes her. The film is an ingenious stab at the inadequacies of modern rape laws and how women can and should get them to work for them. Again Cam draws from that which is closest to her.

"I've a fourteen-year-old daughter. I have the natural mother instinct to protect her. I wanted to show her and all women that there are alternatives. We shouldn't complacently sit by and let something like rape happen to us — physically or mentally."

The reaction to *A Matter of Choice* was fascinating. Most women, as expected, reacted very favorably. An astounding number related similar experiences but said they were too ashamed to take action — weren't sure they could do anything. The men, however, reacted with confusion. Many "couldn't relate to it", some excused it as a bad production, some refused to watch it. "Just goes to show the attitude of a lot of men towards women."

However, says Peter Lower, "It and *Dreamspeaker* set a standard by which future television drama will be judged." We have yet to see *Fred Quilt*, Cam's dramatization of the Fred Quilt trial which will probably never be aired, and *They're Drying Up the Streets*, the film on child exploitation.

Cam's writing is continuous whether it is a film script, poetry, the novel she works on now and then, or one of the seven-page letters she will dash off to a friend. Her writing has been labeled Indian activist, feminist, even spiritualist. Her strongest images have always been feminine, and her fascination for the Northwest Coast Indian culture is probably due to its strong matriarchal traditions. Whatever, she doesn't limit herself to any one cause and she hates the thought of being labeled — of being a "guru" for a movement.

"Look what we did to Ryga. We put him on a hilltop and then, when we'd molded our hero, we had to start throwing rocks at him because his feet were mortal and not godlike."

"I am a writer who happens to be a feminist."

She writes from her guts and if her guts happen to be feminine, well, that's that, it's her truth. □



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August 1978/9

cannes

ramblings and rumblings

by Marc Gervais

To find out why Canada's performance at Cannes was both "intriguing" and "inconclusive", what the Aussies brought from Down Under and more, read film critic Marc Gervais and savor his musings about the Festival of Festivals.



From Olmi's splendid "Clog Tree"
10/Cinema Canada

What is the Canadian film critic's primary job at Cannes? Is it to watch Canadian Films? Or is it to find out as much as possible about a batch of films most of which one knows will never be shown commercially back home?

Chalk it up to naïveté, or idealism, or lack of realism, or whatever, but the fact does remain that some people like to think of movies as something valid, as some vital reflection of our culture, some heightened vision of human experience, some exalted call to life as it should be: quite simply, as a means of communication still capable of producing works of art.

Even critics — well, some of them — manage to feel that way now and then. Pity the poor Canadian scribe, then, burdened with this kind of attitude, as he faces the sixteen-or-so Canadian and the five hundred other films Cannes has to offer in two mad weeks.

To be sure, most of the Cannes action is the fast hustle, film *qua* commodity, exploitation, to be bought and sold. All of this kind of activity is what makes film possible to begin with, right? — at least in terms of our Western ways. The game is immense, it has its conventions and rules — and it is so easy for the critic to play that game, to straight-jacket himself with protocol in those conventions.

The first thing you know, the only *real* question for the Canadian critic tends to become: what about the *Canadian* films? Were they any good? And did they sell?

And yet, there is Cannes, the incomparable showcase for films from all over the globe. Shouldn't film be a force knitting the whole world together, enabling us to share insights and understandings? And shouldn't the role of the critic be to encourage this process? Rhetorical questions, to be sure; but the answers they imply are very difficult to implement.

So these are mixed musings about Cannes, partial comments about disparate aspects, a kind of compromise between "ideal" visions from abroad and home-central preoccupations.

Poland

Without obvious rhyme and reason, let's start then, with Poland. Actually, I saw only two Polish movies at Cannes. And yet, for vague reasons, more or less touched upon above, I find myself returning to them. Poland?

For a number of Canadians, that means the mother country once or twice removed. But as far as Canadian film life is concerned, one might as well be talking about Mars. And yet here is a country with a considerable film history, especially since World War II. Film riches abound; they are not limited to, say, a few early Wajda masterpieces that used to be shown on the film club circuit.

There have been three so-called waves in post-war Polish cinema, culminating in the contemporary third wave, whose acknowledged *chef de file* is Krzysztof Zanussi.

Zanussi's kind of cinema would have a hard time in Canada, given the prescribed nature of our film viewing habits. His latest film, a typically deep, intellectual, inner prober called **Spiral**, serves as a marvelous reflector for Poland's present day cultural sensibility. It was in the official festival competition. For many, it proved to be one of the best at Cannes



One of Zanussi's earlier films, "Family Life"

this year, exploring, in the Polish mode, areas that have remained too exclusively Ingmar Bergman's preserve.

Chance had it that I spent some time with Zanussi in London, where he is teaching for three weeks at the National Film School. Zanussi's views on contemporary culture, on the problems of free creativity in the vastly differing Polish and North American contexts, and on the responsibilities and duties of filmmakers toward their culture were fascinating and enlightening.

To some Canadian film people — Allan King, Harry Gunkin, Paul Almond, a few critics and teachers, and the like — they would make fine sense. But Zanussi's aesthetic and his ethic seem lightyears away from the *politique* underlying most Canadian film life.

Zanussi is nonplussed, not to say keenly frustrated, by his North American *confrères*. Aren't any of them, he asks, believers in some humanistic creed or other, don't they feel involved in society, in twentieth century life, and don't they want to do something about it? So where is their witnessing to this, what are they afraid of, why do they play the cynic's game vis-a-vis the media?

Big questions indeed. And our tragedy if that is not too grandiose a word — is that such questions tend to be considered irrelevant.

Another Pole's work also was much in evidence at Cannes, that of the pre-eminent Andrzej Wajda, still very active, still one of the half-dozen greatest European film directors. **Man of Marble** presented Cannes with an even sharper expression of the Polish political/cultural stance. Here was a film plagued, from its inception, by political censorship, but which, somehow — after two years — managed to find its way to Cannes as the hush-hush special "film surprise". Wajda's movie looks back at the Stalinist fifties, at the role of the media then and now, and comes to a tough, aware, yet conciliatory attitude, both in terms of recent Polish history and in terms of Wajda's own artistic activity. One is tempted to see it as a landmark of sorts in Polish film history.

Meanwhile, back in Toronto and Montreal and once in a while elsewhere in Canada, the money boys go on putting so much energy into trying to produce *consumer* movies. Even our most serious endeavors are inhibited — or usually down-right prevented from existing — by questions such as: "Yes, but what's the latest Hollywood recipe? Will it sell?" And so it goes.

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Poland is only one of many countries with much to offer. A number of them deserve careful study as possible models, *mutatis mutandis*, for our own emulation. At another level, their products could enrich our film viewing habits. But of course those movies are prevented from doing so by the very narrowness of the viewing habits and the economics that control our entire system.

Canada at Cannes

Let's face it, our performance was intriguing, but, by and large, inconclusive. There were things to be happy about, and things to regret. Compared with the past, Canadian business was good, the best yet at Cannes. And that should be good news. George Kaczender's **In Praise of Older Women**, for instance, was not even in Cannes, yet its international sales continued to mount even there. Initial reports indicated that a number of other films were doing well, including Lionel Chetwyn's version of Hugh McLennan's **Two Solitudes**, and some of our more obvious, exploitation flicks.

Yet the general critical reaction to our offerings — all of them on the Market, not a single feature invited to any of the competitions — was one of pronounced disappointment. The question I kept encountering from non-Canadian critics: "What has happened to your films? They used to be so promising (last year)."

I saw about seven, or half, of the "new" Canadian films shown on the market. The Canadian product was, to put it mildly, highly diversified, coming from a variety of opposed approaches, attitudes, ambitions.

There were the culturally prestigious films, very Canadian in content, reverential in their treatment of pre-existing books, such as **Two Solitudes** and Allan King's **Who Has Seen the Wind**. You prefer the chic, glossy, empty international co-productions? We had that too: Stuart Cooper's **The Disappearance**. To be sure, a number of schlock exploitation movies, Hollywood-in-Canada derivatives, were grinding away with varying degrees of success. And then there were the faulted, but more authentically personal, and far more interesting and promising attempts on a more modest level, such as Teri McLuhan's **The Third Walker**. There were even two films by four recent Loyola (Dept. of Communication Studies) grads, one of them an experimental, Marguerite Duras-like feature, **Shadows of Silk**, a tiny-budget affair created by two Montrealers living in Paris. Mary Stephen and John Cressey — and which is enjoying a good run in Paris.

So the Canadians presented a sort of kaleidoscopic effect. The over-all result, however, was anything but spectacular, especially when compared with the relatively stunning array of films on display from, say, Australia.

Australia and/versus Canada

For these last three years, the recurring mood, for this writer at least, has been one of enthusiasm over what is happening in our Commonwealth sister, that sprawling giant Down Under. The Aussies brought roughly the same number of films to Cannes as did the Canadians — but there the similarity ends.

One goes on hearing that Canada has marvelous directors, cameramen, and so on; that we are lacking only in screen writers. Well, when it comes to feature films, I beg to differ, judging from the past few years.

The cluster of Australian films — **Newsfront**, **The Last Wave**, **The Getting of Wisdom**, **The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith**, **Mango Tree**, **Mouth To Mouth**, **Solo**, **The Irishman**, and others — leaves our own output looking pretty shabby.

True, the Aussies generally do have better scripts. But it is not merely a question of the writers, it is a question of the general attitude behind the whole film. One feels the strong native Aussie spirit, the local color, topics that are indigenous to Aussie culture. So the films have a certain ring of truth and freshness about them — qualities so often lacking in Canadian products.

And they have a *look*. The Aussies are high on their own vast spaces; and their cameras are communicating to us. It may smack of old-time, pre-distanciation aesthetics, but the Aussies go in for a cinema that *sings*. Even if it means having to find some pretext for using a plane or helicopter, up they go, enabling their cameras to fill the screen with celebration of Australia's marvelous landscape. Just as the Americans did with their Westerns.

We have an even bigger country, I am told. But, judging from most of our efforts of late, it is not our cinema that can sing that song. The very film stock — or perhaps it is the way it is finally processed — seems to help *diminish* our sense of space and color. *Our* cameras are timorous, cast down, communicating a feeling of claustrophobia; and the colors that fill our Canadian features are — again, by and large; this does not apply to films like **Who Has Seen the Wind** — without the Australian, or Swedish, or English, or French, or Hungarian, or whatever, glow.

Canada has a distinguished record in the area of the direct cinema, the documentary, and animation. But in the area of fiction features, it may well be that Canadian talent simply has not reached the standards of many other countries, including non-majors such as Australia. One hates to think that it is the Canadian spirit that is at fault; that in spite of our unparalleled possibilities, we cannot respond, artistically or otherwise and are too busy wailing how we, the richest of earthlings, are so miserable.

It is difficult to pinpoint the whys and wherefores. And certainly the answer is fraught with paradox. Maybe it is that Australia — to return to that country, since the parallel with Canada is so obvious — benefits from being isolated, to a certain extent, from other Anglophone Whites. That Pacific Ocean keeps the USA far away, in more ways than one. Quite possibly, the Aussies have been forced to trust their own history and geography in a way beyond our experience, totally dominated as we are media-wise and every other-wise by the giant to the South.

We have our Canadian Film Development Corp., which has helped create and develop our feature film industry. The CFDC, let it be noted, is officially interested in culture, as well as the commercial aspects of film. The irony is that the various Australian government bodies that help finance their films define themselves uniquely as banks, and in no way as cultural monitors. And yet, the Aussie films over-all have a far more developed sense of culture. Their films are not yet masterpieces, but both at the artistic and the popular levels they are better than ours.

Let's compound the irony. One would wish that Aussie films would appear on Canadian screens so that English-Canadians could see their own background and cultural roots reflected better than in their own films! So far, however, Aussie films have not been shown here to any appreciable

extent. For example, the only print of a beautiful 1976 movie, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, that is available in Canada is French-dubbed.

The reasons for a situation that verges on the absurd? One seems to be that the Australians, unrealistic in their demands on Canadian film distributors, are asking for too much money up front. They do not seem to understand the degree to which the Canadian (and American) audiences are limited to certain kinds of subjects and certain kinds of approaches, all of this, of course, is the fruit of years of carefully nurtured and controlled viewing habits. For the Australians to break through, they must work with Canadian distributors and exhibitors who are sharp enough to realize that, at least initially they must aim for special audiences, use specialized promotion, and soon. In other words, modest beginnings.

A recent seminar in London, sponsored by the British Film Institute, demonstrated that the Australians are anything but sensitive to these kinds of realities. Surrounded by friends and admirers, their mood, unfortunately, shuffled from lack of interest to defensiveness against anticipated criticisms. So, all in all, the day of fruitful Australian-Canadian collaboration seems still a bit far off, for a variety of reasons. Still, one can hope.

Thus, for one set of possibilities.

Other models, to be sure, abound. The West Germans, for instance, loosed a veritable flood of films upon Cannes this year. A number of their more artistically ambitious ventures — these tend to be the ones threatened with meagre box office returns — are in great part financed by state-backed television, destined for both TV and theatrical release. In this fashion, they are almost guaranteed not to lose money.

Italy, certainly one of the Movie Big Four (along with the U.S., Britain and France) in the West, operates on another formula. Besides giving to *all* Italian-made films (what I believe is) 14 percent of each film's box office earnings, garnered from a general tax levied on total box office returns (including returns on American film imports), the Italian state, through three outlets — RAI for television, Luce and Italoledge for film — *totally* finances certain films of defi-



Last year's Cannes winner, "Padre Padrone"

nite cultural promise. *Padre Padrone*, by the Taviani brothers, was one such film; and it won at Cannes last year.

This year, the formula struck gold again. The most stunning film at Cannes, the one that garnered the "Palme d'Or" and a bushel of other awards, was Ermanno Olmi's *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs*.

The Tree of the Wooden Clogs was wholly financed by Italoledge; and the thinking behind this financing was quite lucid, centering as it does on Olmi himself. For the last ten years or so, Olmi's films and television creations have been financed *entirely* by state agencies. Olmi is rightly considered a serious, brilliant artist, one deeply attuned and dedicated to the cultural dimensions of the media. Given the pattern of today's film market, it is obvious that Olmi stands little chance competing with the mass exploitation flicks. So the state, recognizing the value of his work, assumes the financial responsibility, including the distribution of his film. To put it metaphorically and prejudicially: the state cultivates this rose in the wasteland.



Lombardy farmers serve as actors in "Clog Tree"

The result? In the case of *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs*, a glowing work that not only stands out against the contemporary injustice, alienation, and viciousness, but that soars into the realm of exalted art — whatever that may be. *The Tree of the Wooden Clogs* is the antithesis of the recipes now dominating the media. It makes demands of an audience. It signals the supremacy of contemplation over titillation, respect over exploitation, depth over superficiality, open-mindedness over propaganda.

With it, Olmi may at long last receive the international acclaim he deserves as the great successor of the early Rossellini and De Sica — no small praise indeed — but in the contemporary mode. Paradoxically enough, the film will make its money back many times over in the special film houses and the TV networks in many countries around the world.

So there are models and possibilities, and with imagination and perhaps radical rearranging, the Canadian situation could be helped to realize its potential more fully. For that, however, we have to have the insight, the knowledge, and the willingness to break out of our boxes.

Ultimately, that may be Cannes' chief role, surpassing even its mammoth market function: by gathering together such a multitude of approaches for mutual display, it can help point the way for achieving finer results. □

getting it right

by Anthony Hall

The films vs the facts as told by Canadian historian, Anthony Hall. Or do *Marie-Anne* and *Riel* tell it like it was?



Raymond Cloutier as Riel is surrounded by Roger Blay (left) and Don Francis (right)

Canadian filmmakers are increasingly looking to our country's history for their inspiration. And the saga of the development of the Canadian West is naturally attracting much of their attention. *Marie-Anne*, a new feature produced by Edmonton's Fil Fraser, and the CBC's controversial *Riel*, are reflective of this trend. The stories the films tell present a very different kind of image of the American West than that made famous by Hollywood. But in charting new frontiers of history for the cinema, the makers of *Riel* and *Marie-Anne* have not come to terms with the full implications of the national heritage they are seeking to enrich. An analysis of the historical accuracy of these movies, explains why this is so.

Marie-Anne is about an actual historical figure, Marie-Anne Gaboury, who was the first white woman to settle in the Canadian West. In 1806 she married the illustrious buffalo hunter, Jean-Baptiste Lagemodière, and left Lower Canada for the North Saskatchewan. Arriving a year later at Fort Edmonton, the young couple, now with child, found themselves threatened by Jean-Baptiste's madly jealous former Indian lover. *Marie-Anne's* plot is chiefly concerned with this love triangle.

Andrée Pelletier, the daughter of Canada's Ambassador to France, plays the title role in a sensitive, if emotionally limited, way. John Juliani is the rather archetypal male lead, while Tantoo Martin turns in a dynamic performance as the Indian girl caught between the conflicting mores of two different cultures. The camera work by Reg Morris is technically slick, and the film conveys an overall impression of exuberant vitality that is pleasing to behold. Unfortunately, however, *Marie-Anne* tends to distort rather than clarify understanding of the historical era in which the story is set.

Screen writer Marjorie Morgan has depended almost entirely on a few journals and diaries for the information that enabled her to recreate the story. The result is a plot that is faithful to many of the details of the main characters' lives, but which fails to capture the broader outlines of the historical developments taking place during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Nowhere is there the slightest illumination about the nature of the fur trade, which after all was the main enticement drawing Marie-Anne and Jean-Baptiste into the West. We are left completely ignorant of the epic struggle between the North West Company of Montreal and the Hudson's Bay Company. During Marie-Anne's early years in the West this trade war came to dominate many aspects of life, especially at Fort Edmonton where most of the film is set. This Hudson's Bay Company post was only "a musket shot" away from the North West Company's Fort Augustus, and yet we are told nothing of the face to face competition for the Indians' commerce.

A significant part of the story takes place across the vast expanse of wilderness between Lower Canada and Fort Edmonton. The filmmakers fail to convey, however, any convincing sense of the ruggedness, the diversity and the vastness of this land mass. Nor do they provide an authentic image of the ingenious transportation network that bound it together. Similarly, they fail to give even a glimpse of the fur trade's fascinating food support industry of which Jean-Baptiste, as a famous buffalo hunter, must have been an integral part.

Tony Hall is a teaching assistant working on his doctorate in Canadian history at the University of Toronto. He is also a filmmaker who has made several short films which include Serpent River Paddlers, Flight Plan and Sky Surfers.



The original Fort Garry



Fort Garry on the Humber

The most obvious explanation for these shortcomings is the \$650,000 budget, which limited both the filmmakers' travelling and the ambitiousness of their historical recreations. I'm afraid a more fundamental problem, however, is their lack of familiarity with the epoch they are seeking to bring to life. To fill this vacuum of understanding, *Marie-Anne's* makers sometimes fall back on the tired clichés of "Hollywood's Canada." Indeed, they tend towards the escapist fantasies of the past that have long since become unfashionable in the American film capital. Uniformly attractive people are cast in both the major and the minor roles, and their laundry always has a fresh, crisp look. There is little evidence of the rich pigments of blood and hunger and disease and sweat that colored the country's early colonization.

One of the reasons for the hygienic texture of the film was the use of a tourist installation for its major set. The problems of shooting around reconstructed Fort Edmonton were outlined by *Marie-Anne's* first-time director, R. Martin Walters. Parking lots and neatly manicured lawns surround the fort. These had to be covered up and made suitably rustic, but only to the extent the Edmonton Parks Board would allow. Walters had special trouble with the Indian Village site, which was plowed for a railway just as he was beginning to shoot. Since *Marie-Anne* was filmed in late summer at the height of the tourist season, the crew's movements were limited and all filming had to be planned in close co-ordination with the scheduling of tours.

With a budget several times bigger than that for *Marie-Anne*, the makers of *Riel* have been able to avoid many of these problems. Almost every set was built from scratch, and art director Bill Beeton has done a commendable job of research to ensure that no detail of the backdrop is too wildly at variance with the historical facts. Reconstructed Fort Garry has, of course, been considerably scaled down from the original, and details of building design have been modified to facilitate the smooth flow of the story. Some sequences deemed to be deeply rooted in the public's consciousness, such as *Riel's* courtroom and hanging scenes, have been designed to precisely correspond with existing photographs. From all that one can tell from visiting the set, the general feel of the period seems to have been realistically recreated. Because *Riel* was shot in the early spring, the environment is powerfully raw and inhospitable. Mud is everywhere and smeared over everything. The homes, the costumes and the characters have that casual well-lived-in look that can only be achieved through studious attention to detail.

Most Canadians are far more familiar with the life story of Louis Riel than they are with that of Marie-Anne Lagemodière, who happens to have been the Métis leader's grandmother. The issues surrounding Riel's death have remained so controversial in fact, that for many they continue to relate closely to the key questions concerning Canada's future identity. It is ironic, then, that *Riel* is being brought to life in Metropolitan Toronto, the city that best symbolizes the anti-Catholic, anti-French centralizing forces that martyred the rebel chief. The production's geographic location, however, is not reflective of the story's historical perspective.

Roy Moore's famous \$100,000 script leans more towards the bias of Peter Charlebois (*The Life of Louis Riel*, Toronto, 1975) than that of Donald Creighton (*John A. Macdonald, The Old Chieftain*, Toronto, 1955). The former characterizes Riel as "first and foremost a patriotic Canadian", while the latter sees him as "a selfish, anarchic blackmailing adventurer." Another strong influence on the screen play has been George Woodcock's biography of Riel's closest ally, Gabriel Dumont (*Gabriel Dumont, The Métis Chief and His Lost World*, Edmonton, 1975). Woodcock has become one of the foremost literary spokesmen of the movement advocating more autonomy for the regions and ethnic minorities in Canada — a view of the country that will be well represented by the CBC's \$1,500,000 extravaganza.

In spite of the extensive research that has clearly gone into the making of *Riel*, the plot sometimes deviates from the historical record. John A. Macdonald is depicted as Prime Minister during the time when Alexander Mackenzie was in power, for instance, and Bishop Bourget endures in the film beyond the actual date of his death. Such licence with the facts is justified, says *Riel's* producer John Trent, by the need to streamline the story's complexities in order to make for more effective dramatic presentation. Only when the production is complete can his judgment on matters like this be assessed.

An historical distortion of a more serious nature is the absence in the plot of any meaningful handling of the language issue. Of course this silence in a unilingual film is understandable. Any specific reference to the Métis winning, in 1871, the right to French language instruction in Manitoba's public schools, for instance, would have seemed ridiculous if announced by them in English. Trent tries to downgrade such difficulties by explaining that, like Sir Thomas More in *A Man For All Seasons*, the real conflict in which Riel was

caught was between Church and State rather than linguistic groups.

The argument serves Trent poorly, for after the Conquest of New France by the British in 1760 the Roman Catholic Church assumed responsibility for the survival of the French Fact in North America. Thus language rights, which have usually been bound up in the struggle for separate schools, are repeatedly at the heart of clashes between the secular and ecclesiastical authorities of Canada. Key aspects of the Riel affair, such as the above mentioned language provisions in the Manitoba Act of 1871, demonstrate the point nicely. Christopher Plummer, who portrays John A. Macdonald, apparently had a sense of the role linguistic variety could play in the film. He asked to do a couple of scenes in French with Jean-Louis Roux, who plays the role of Montreal's Bishop Ignace Bourget. The request was denied.

Except for the accents of the principal characters, the realizers of *Marie-Anne*, like those of *Riel*, fail to acknowledge that French was a major working language in the Canadian West during the era they seek to illuminate. The anomaly of Frenchmen speaking English among themselves is most evident in the scenes set in the quaint Lower Canadian community of Maskinongé, where Jean-Baptiste and Marie-Anne were married. Of course it is easy to criticize unimaginative approaches to the language question. It is much more difficult to suggest concrete ways that the real linguistic richness of our diverse cultural heritage can be cinematically conveyed. Clearly there is no simple answer to the problem of dramatizing historical events for unilingual audiences in which the interplay of languages forms a key component.

In order to achieve a degree of linguistic authenticity, the filmmakers considered here have seen fit to sacrifice some of the audience's grasp of what the Indians have to say. *Marie-Anne's* native people speak among themselves in their ancestral tongue, while apparently *Riel* has a few words of Cree here and there." That the French speakers are always translated while the Indians sometimes not, seems to imply a feeling that it is more important to understand white rather than native people.

I am not suggesting that the films display an overt malevolence against Indians. Both the makers of *Marie-Anne* and *Riel* cite sound reasons for portraying native people as they do. In *Riel* the Indian's central role in the North-West Rebellion of 1885 is not really explored. Big Bear and Poundmaker are given no parts because of the need to synthesize the story into manageable proportions. Similarly, the Indian community outside the gates of Fort Edmonton in *Marie-Anne* seems relatively small and weak. This is simply because the money was not available to hire more extras. While it is easy to sympathize with such considerations in isolation, their cumulative effect over the years has resulted in making the Indian seem more like an ornament than a prime mover of our history. We have forgotten how profoundly the colonial development of North America has been influenced by the native presence.

The Indians' strength was especially great during the era portrayed in *Marie-Anne* when fur was king. Correspondingly the power of the French and English traders was limited. The film, however, depicts the latter as the dominant group in the Canadian West. They could be more authentically characterized, I believe, as guests whose well-being was conditional upon their maintaining the Indians' good favor. Part of the



Producer John Trent (seated) on location for the *Riel* shoot

problem is the imposing nature of reconstructed Fort Edmonton, which suggests a misleading picture of the interracial balance that existed in 1808. The structure has been built to duplicate conditions circa 1845. By this time North Saskatchewan was a far different place than what it was when Marie-Anne first arrived.

By underplaying the Indians' involvement in the North-West Uprising of 1885, the makers of *Riel* similarly distort the historical events they describe. The Métis rebels that took up arms numbered less than 1,000, while there were 20,000 starving discontented Indians in the region who were beginning to discover the cruel meaning of the treaties they had recently signed. It was the latter group rather than the former which constituted the greatest threat to the civil authority and by their actions, both *Riel* and the Prime Minister eventually demonstrated that they recognized the fact.

In the CBC's drama we see none of this. While the Métis are at last given their say, the Indians are once again relegated to the periphery of the major events. Exactly how an accurate

image of the scale and complexity of historical Indian culture can be transferred to the screen at a realistic cost, remains an open question. Even the opening segment of *The Newcomers*, a well-funded hour devoted to the dramatic recreation of prehistorical West Coast society, hardly penetrates the most superficial level of the aboriginal psyche. Like the language issue, the Indian question awaits a truly innovative dramatic handling by a Canadian filmmaker.

But, in spite of their misrepresentations *Riel* and *Marie-Anne* still present a much truer image of the country's past than *Hollywood's Canada*. A new kind of Western is being created from stuff that has perhaps even greater mythic power than the uniform expansion of the frontier in the United States. Among the principal movers behind this trend are Fil Fraser and John Trent, whose most recent productions will hopefully someday be regarded as seminal films of an internationally recognized genre. And now that we are really taking seriously the challenge of cinematically interpreting Canada's history for ourselves and the world, we must work harder to get it right. □

but if you ever really win...

Drawing on their Canadian heritage, Fil Fraser and John Trent are two producers who are making our film industry happen. Their commitment to making a film that is both universal in its emotional appeal and yet firmly rooted in Canadian soil.

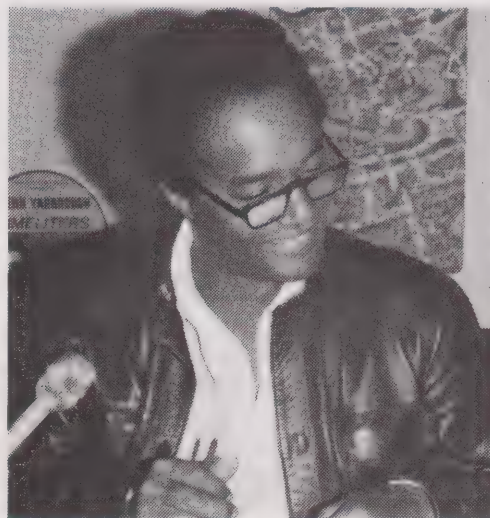
by Anthony Hall

fil fraser

Fil Fraser is an urbane 45 year old black man who grew up in a bilingual home in Montreal. For several years he has been the popular host of an Edmonton hot-line show, giving him the enviable freedom of a well paying job that requires no work after noon. From this base Fraser put together the money and the talent for **Why Shoot the Teacher** which he co-produced with CTV. To date the film has earned more in English Canada (around \$2,000,000) than any other domestically-made film. His stunning success as a first-time producer resulted in an appointment to a task force charged to advise the Alberta government on future film policy. In this capacity Fraser travelled widely, and contributed to a report recently tabled in the Alberta legislature recommending that the province create "a self-destructing Crown Corporation" to stimulate development in film.

He and his task force colleagues patterned their proposals on what they found in Québec, and particularly in Australia. There, explains Fraser, state officials-equivalent to our provincial officials-set up lines of credit to stimulate movie production. At first, Australian filmmakers tried to play the same "game" that many Canadians have attempted, making their films appear culturally neutral in the hopes of gaining a foothold in the lucrative Ameri-

can market. This strategy was soon rejected, however, and they began to make films "within budget parameters that would allow them a chance of making their money back in Australia." With less pressure to appeal to international audiences, Australian filmmakers eased into a style of production reflecting better the local idiom. The result has been pictures such as **Picnic at Hanging Rock**, **Storm Boy** and **The**



Producer Fil Fraser

Last Wave which do tremendously well at home, and have an honesty and integrity that is endearing them to a growing number of viewers outside the country.

Fraser sees no irony in this, for to him, "all great films are regional." "It is only by being specific to a time and place," he continues, "that truth and universality can be achieved." Thus, he cautions: "Before we go knocking a-

round with our eye on the Americans and the rest of the world, we need to mine our own territory. That's not to say that we ignore the rest and build a wall around us. It is to say that there's damn good money and good audiences and good stuff to do in film here, and if we do it well here, if it works here, it should work everywhere else, because we're not so different from everybody else." Fraser characterizes Canada's market for its own films as basically "underdeveloped." He maintains, however, that even in this disorganized state there is a proven potential here for a movie to earn \$5,000,000!

Why Shoot the Teacher demonstrated that \$2,000,000 can be reaped from English-Canadian theatre goers, and movies in French Canada have grossed \$3,000,000. Fraser's new film, **Marie-Anne**, represents an attempt to put together these markets by telling a story of real interest to both audiences. The vehicle that will accomplish this goal, Fraser hopes, is a romantic dramatization of the trials faced by the first white woman to enter the Canadian West. Andrée Pelletier, who plays the title role, and her male lead, John Juliani, will dub themselves into "Québécois" for the French release.

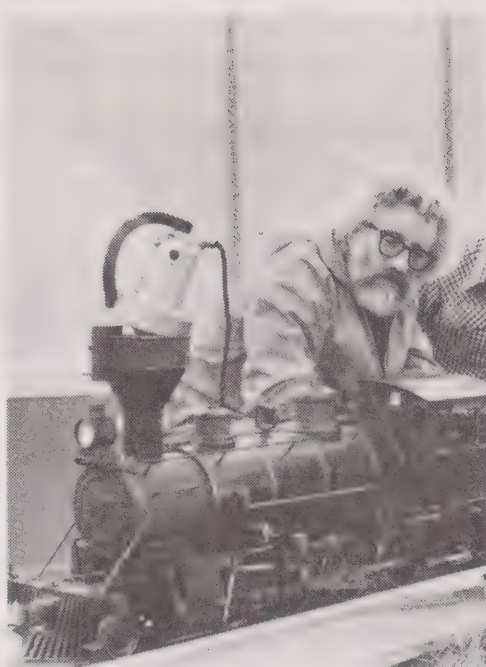
In spite of the unifying trend of Fraser's marketing strategy, he disclaims any political motives. "We're not trying to solve the Canadian dilemma or rewrite Canadian history," he asserts, continuing: "**Marie-Anne** is not a documentary. It's entertainment. There's an

audience for plain honest films like this one that just tell a good story and send you home feeling good." The success of **Teacher** suggests that Fraser has a fine sense of what Canadian audiences want, and there is no reason to believe he will be wrong with **Marie-Anne**. His next project is **Back to Beulah**, for which he has secured W.O. Mitchell's first completed screen play. It will probably be directed by R. Martin Walters, whose first feature was **Marie-Anne**. Like many of the film people Fraser is gathering around him, Walters' expertise comes primarily from working on American features shot in the Canadian West.

Fraser is obviously a man of many ideas and deep convictions. He shows no sign of awkwardness when he calmly asserts: "We're reinventing the Canadian film industry." But in spite of such self-confidence he remains aware of the painful fate awaiting failed producers. "With every project you're putting yourself on the line intellectually, emotionally, spiritually and of course economically." Why expose yourself to these dangers? Fraser replies: "I'm turned on by the entrepreneurial challenge involved in making films in Canada at this time. Everybody says you can't do it, but if you ever really win---WOW!"

john trent

Since John Trent arrived here from England in 1957, he has become a most forceful individual in the Canadian film industry. He began his career as a writer for a music magazine, but soon moved into the fast growing field of television. He has literally hundreds of credits to his name for producing and directing projects ranging from a **Profile of Mao's China** (1962) to **Wojek** (1966) to **Moment of Truth** (1965), a soap opera done for NBC. This is one of several experiences Trent has had working for American organizations such as MGM, but he has repeatedly returned to Toronto where his family is settled. In Canada his involvement with the film industry has been on many levels. A sampling of his activities include a term as president of the Directors' Guild of Canada, and a period of the Advisory Board of the CFDC. Trent is also a founder of the prolific Quadrant Films Company.



Producer John Trent

Riel, 'a CBC co-production, is John Trent's latest project in a career dominated by ambitious undertakings. "Basically it's a film of revolution," he explains, comparing it with **The Battle of Algiers**. "Revolution is a reality close to every country," Trent continues, "and so **Riel** is a universal story." His interest in the international appeal of the production is understandable because he has a financial interest in its world sales through Green River Films, the co-producing company. This is the first time the CBC has made such a production arrangement, and so it represents an important breakthrough in the Corporation's policy. Says Trent: "The CBC is beginning to become outward looking. Its management under Don MacPherson understands that there must be some relationship with the private sector. They believed that the time was right, and that I could do a good job for them for the money."

Trent's reputation as well as his wealth is riding on the fate of **Riel**, and thus his career is currently in a holding pattern. Assuming success, he would like to go on doing stories about the history of the Canadian West. Other situations he would consider dramatizing involve the War of 1812, the saga of the United Empire Loyalists and the condition of the Italian community in Toronto. Like the Albertan producer Fil Fraser, he maintains that "Canadian films will find a place on the world market only when they are about Canada."

In spite of such pronouncements, the completed work that Trent seems to

hold closest to his heart is **Homer**, which he directed in 1969. Although filmed in Ontario, this anti-Vietnam War movie is dramatically set in rural Wisconsin. The picture earned high praise from sources such as Rex Reed, *The New York Times* and *Time*. It is currently winning renewed attention in the USA as an important document of social history. Trent contrasts the handling he has received from the American press to the treatment he gets at home. The local media, he believes, was especially unfair in its savage criticism of the **Whiteoaks of Jalna** series, which he produced in 1971. Pointing to a vindictive attack on **Riel** in the June 12th issue of *Maclean's*, Trent maintains that the Canadian press is once again gathering forces to kill an attempt to create art in this country.

Trent claims that his displeasure with some factions in the media stems not from personal bitterness at having been criticized, but rather from a deep conviction that journalists are hindering the development of creativity in Canada. He explains: "In Britain and the United States, they have a way of bolstering their own culture, their own artists and their own situation. On the other hand the press here never stands up for anything that's Canadian." Trent feels that this lack of press support is one of the major reasons many of our best show business people leave Canada for the United States. "They train on stuff our critics say is bad," he declares, "and later go on to achieve success elsewhere which belies the judgment made in Canada about their earlier work." "It is very sad," Trent sighs.

Like so many who touch the story of Louis Riel, Trent sees parallels between contemporary injustices in Canada and the persecution of the famous rebel leader. The "cripple kickers" in the press, he believes, "drive show business talent out of the country just as they drove Riel out of the country." What makes him stay in an environment he believes to be so unappreciative of the artist? Perhaps it is the sheer challenge of surviving against the odds as a filmmaker. "When you do things in Canada you do them for the first time," he exclaims, adding: "When you consider that we're right next door to the most powerful media machine in the world, it's incredible that our film industry has come as far as it has in the past ten or fifteen years." □

maurice bulbulian

a camera and a purpose

by René Balcer

By putting a human face on the issues of poverty in Little Burgundy, Quebec and of capitalist oppression in the mines of Chile, Maurice Bulbulian strives towards a "democracy of communications". He documents a gestalt of art and life where a film's subjects, as well as its filmmaker and audience, learn from the cooperative process.



A meeting at the NFB from *La P'tite Bourgogne*: Bulbulian with camera

"It's not encouraging to tell a story when there's no one to laugh at the punch line."

These words, spoken by a mining unionist at the end of Maurice Bulbulian's **La Richesse Des Autres**, could have just as well been spoken by Bulbulian himself; the films that he has made since joining the NFB thirteen years ago remain little-known, not only in Canada but in Québec as well. His situation is not unique; it is echoed in frustration by most Québec filmmakers as they witness their cinema being in turn ignored, impeded, and ultimately strangled. "But," concludes Bulbulian, "on a personal level, all you can do is keep on making films."

And this he does, like the radioman on a sinking ship, trying to send out as many S.O.S.'s as possible.

His latest film, **Les Gars Du Tabac**, was screened as part of the Critic's Festival in Montréal in August, and he has three films set for release this fall. His subjects have ranged from victims of urban renovation in Montréal's Little Burgundy slum district to Québec's forestry workers to miners in Québec and Chile; films whose interest go beyond one's backyard. Yet, even in his own backyard, Bulbulian remains unknown.

It is perhaps the subjects themselves which, in the present system, preclude the films' being shown and known. Or even the presentation itself, a kind of direct-cinema approach which promulgates the orchestration of alternative opinions by the filmmaker while letting the subject speak for himself. In other words, it is not the kind of thing film exhibitors are anxious to run in their theatres.

Replies Bulbulian, "No matter who the people are, the expression of their problems as they themselves see them has as much right to be shown on the CBC or in any theatre as does Sam Peckinpah's latest film."

Bulbulian's interest in film and his belief in the underdog's right to a well-organized and sophisticated presentation of his situation go back a long way. After spending his childhood in a parish hall watching Charlie Chan and Tarzan films, Bulbulian joined his high school's cine-club where, on the first night's program, he saw Ford's **The Grapes of Wrath** and Flaherty's **The Land**. Parallels to Bulbulian's approach can be seen especially in the latter film; Flaherty broke from his established structure and, in **The Land**, digressed from the more global problems of farming to illustrate the consequences of such problems through personal stories told by farmers. This approach, combined with Ford's demonstration of the dramatic and textural potential of a socially-conscious cinema, finds its synthesis, albeit not always successful, in Bulbulian's documentaries. Of course, this is not to say that Bulbulian stands alone in this regard; his work falls in line with that of Brault, Perrault, King and others of the direct-cinema.

In terms of thematic expression, his films, although dealing with varied situations and conditions, are of people in transition trying to retain or regain control of their lives. In his first social document, **La P'tite Bourgogne** (1968), he took a year to follow a group of slum citizens faced with eviction who were trying to organize and deal themselves into the decision-making process. In **Un Lendemain Comme Hier** (1970), a family from rural Québec, now living in Montréal, goes back to their native Lac St-Jean for the blueberry picking season; the children, having lost interest in their

parents' traditions, decide to return to Montréal and, as a result, the parents are forced to evaluate their own move to the big city.

In **Dan Nos Forêts** (1971), part one of a trilogy on the Québec forest, workers try to revitalize their sagging wood industry by starting cooperatives; but community apathy and government interference doom their efforts. In **La Richesse Des Autres** (1973), Québec miners, in an attempt to find solutions to the problems inherent to their occupation, visit Chile to see the reality of nationalization but the context is too different and the Chilean experiment does not mesh with North American values. In **La Revanche** (1974), part two of the forest trilogy, pre-war efforts to form cooperatives are contrasted with the efforts documented in **Dans Nos Forêts**. **Les Gars Du Tabac** (1977) is a reportage on transient young Quebeckers trying to find work in the tobacco fields of Ontario who meet with intolerance and unconcern instead. **Ameshkuatan**, to be released this fall and the last of the forest trilogy, documents the relationship between the Montagnais tribe and the forest, and how this relationship has been eroded by government relocation of the bands on seaside reserves far from the forest. **Tierra y Libertan** and **Amory Cumbia**, also to be released this fall, deal with the urban poor in Mexico and their efforts to organize and gain control of the land on which they live.



Bulbulian confers with the evicted residents of Little Burgundy

Far from being an intrusion, Bulbulian's crew and the film itself become part of the subject's movement towards and eventual solution to his problem; as most direct-cinema filmmakers, Bulbulian does not hesitate to act as a catalyst. In **La Richesse Des Autres**, he organized the trip to Chile. In **La P'tite Bourgogne**, he set up a meeting between the evicted citizens and municipal and provincial representatives in an NFB studio to clarify issues and assess the progress to date; in the same film, he organized a visit to a city housing project already completed by the Little Burgundy residents and invited Radio-Canada to report on the event. This visit forms one of the more chilling sequences in the film as we hear of the living conditions, complete with rent-a-cops, spies and overnight evictions, prevailing in the housing project.

Another aspect of Bulbulian's films, evident in other direct-cinema works, is the lack of chauvinism exhibited by the filmmaker towards his subjects: "We try to involve them in the process of developing a theme, to bring them into the adventure of filmmaking." The two Mexican films were made

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Faces etched into a fresco; a Québec miner confronts his Chilean counterparts in **La Richesse Des Autres**

using a feedback method usually associated with and perhaps facilitated by VTR. Bulbulian screened the eight hours of footage for the benefit of members of the Tierra Y Libertan organization of urban poor; the screening was followed by discussions between the members and Bulbulian after which he came back to Canada to do the rough cut. He returned to Mexico, screened the rough cut, had more discussions and then did the fine cut in Canada. Far from abdicating responsibility, Bulbulian makes clear for whose benefit the films are being made: the subjects learn as much from the cooperative process as do the filmmakers and the audience.

This type of thing, some might say, is perhaps better suited to video than film but Bulbulian, himself a former animator of Montréal's Videographe, replies:

"...the so-called democracy of communications. There was a mistake when they developed instruments of smaller resolution and gave them to 'the people' under the pretext of democratization. The reverse should have been done; that is opening up access to existing media with established instruments. The value of what you say is only worth the quality of your image. So, under the pretext of democratizing communications, less value was given to the image with these techniques (VTR). The same goes for Super 8... and, after all, 22/Cinema Canada

16mm. The ideal is 35mm but here you have economic restrictions. In the final analysis, with video you work with false impressions."

What does distinguish Bulbulian from other direct-cinema directors is his somewhat didactic attitude towards his audience, an attitude that perhaps came out of his early training as a scientist, his three years spent teaching sciences, and the dozen educational film-loops on scientific subjects that he made at the NFB prior to **La P'tite Bourgogne**. Although Bulbulian would balk at the suggestion that he is trying to teach the viewer something, the "lessons" in his films are clearly drawn using parallel situations to point out the dialectics of an issue.

This method is particularly evident in **La Richesse Des Autres** and in **La Revanche**. The former film, although dealing on the surface with the exploitation of Québec resources by outsiders, indicates a spiritual and political wealth which the Chileans had and that was lacking in Quebec. During one sequence, Chilean miners describe the steps they took to gain control of their mines, what the situation was like before the take-over and what they have gained from it. The scene switches to Québec where some miners and their families are sitting around a table covered with food. One of them asks, after enumerating his own problems, "What's the use of

making a revolution?" Cut back to Chile where Allende, in a speech to miners, answers, "Our revolution is one of collective socialism, to regain our dignity." Chilean miners go on to explain how they were drawn into servitude by the American owners of their mines, how they tried to be like "Yankees", and then, finally, talk disparagingly of American attitudes, "For Americans, life is money." Cut back once again to Québec where a miner's wife explains, "If I didn't have \$1,000, I couldn't live... my biggest hobby is shopping."

In *La Revanche*, the dialectic is drawn between the unsuccessful efforts of forestry workers to set up cooperatives in the '70s with the memories of a man who successfully set up co-ops in the '30s and '40s. Dramatic old footage of workers chopping wood and taking charge of their own sawmills is played against contemporary undertakings; here again, the founder of the early co-ops exudes a spiritual strength lacking in the '70s as he quotes from Savard's "Menaud Maître-Draveur", "We must have the courage to regain what we have lost."

Fortunately, his didactic and rational concerns do not submerge Bulbulian's humanism, for a great deal of his films' strength relies on intuitive rather than rational decisions. One example of this is Bulbulian's use of a highly effective and dramatic technique, the "guided tour". in *La P'tite Bourgogne*, an evicted resident walks along a boarded-up row of houses while giving us a run-down of who was living where, for how long, what their reactions were to the evictions, and

where they finally moved to. The man colors his tour with anecdotes about the people he mentions, delivering a kind of eulogy to the neighbourhood he grew up in. In *La Richesse Des Autres*, a similar tour is given by a mining unionist as he takes a helicopter ride over mines in Northern Québec, describing the conflicts, the closures, the abandoned towns and the mines that never opened. Aside from the dry facts, the audience is given to consider the quality of the speaker's voice, his intonations and colloquialisms, and insights into the issue at hand: incidental details which are nevertheless responsible for the films' human richness. But it also leaves the films open to accusations of a lack of rigor vis-à-vis their themes.

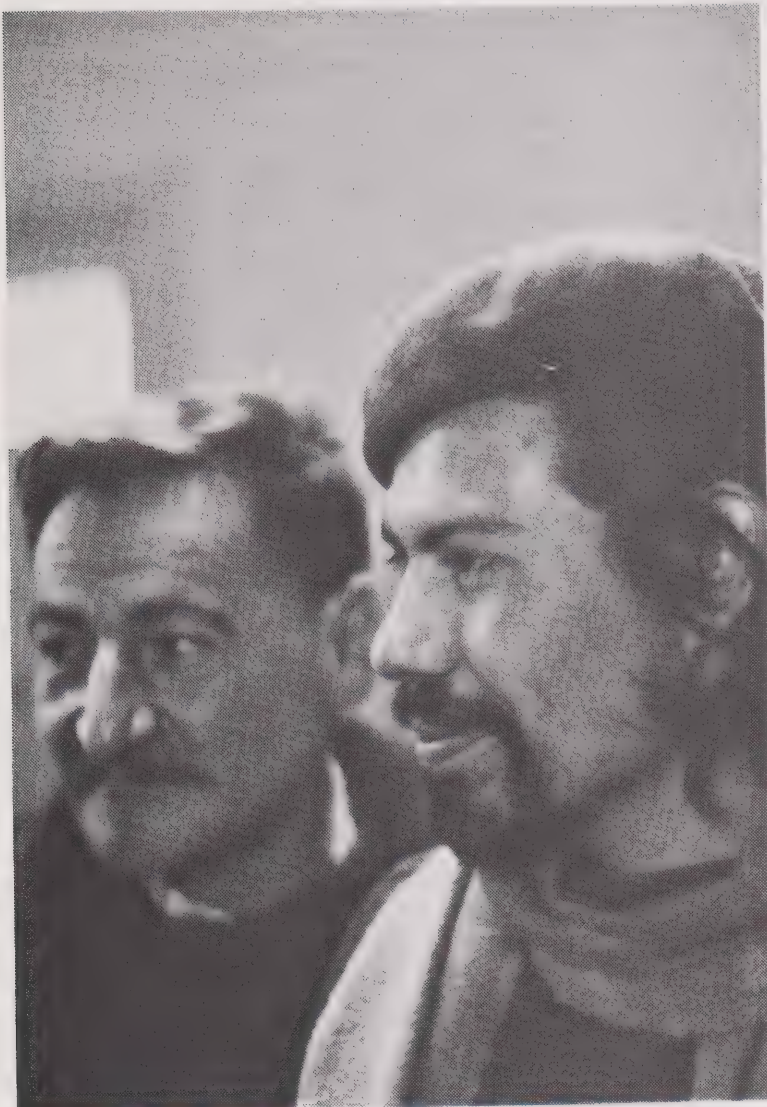
Bulbulian himself would be the last one to describe his approach as objective: *La P'tite Bourgogne* was to be a "film-choc" on the inherent injustice of massive evictions, but, as the filming progressed and as the producer, Robert Forget, tended towards a more objective and global film, packed with facts and opinions from both sides, Bulbulian became increasingly inclined towards what he describes as "an advanced subjectivity: a bias and a technique at the disposal of the citizens." This bias is evident from the very first shots; a surrealistic travel of a deserted Habitat '67 is followed by a travel along the streets of Little Burgundy into the backyard of a tenement where a large family sits in a swing-chair. The film goes beyond the obvious contrast as the family engages the filmmaker in some small talk which ends with the grandmother's rendition of an old song; the song echoes as the travel through Little Burgundy resumes. It is by putting a human face on the issues that Bulbulian hooks his audience. And it is when Bulbulian achieves a balance between the ideological and the personal that his films are most successful.

The best example of this is *La Richesse Des Autres*, whose location shooting was directed by Michel Gauthier. Aside from being a textbook illustration of the evolution of a political issue from personal problem to shared concern to political platform, it is an imposing fiasco of mining and of a miner's life, encompassing occupational diseases, family tensions, deterioration of physical and mental health, strikes, lock-outs, and the creation of ghost towns. The two concerns, far from engaging in a useless diatribe, complement each other as the film switches back and forth from the private statement of a problem to its discussion in a political forum.

"Some people wanted to see a better defined political line," says Bulbulian. "But I found that it was more important to represent the miner's state of mind than to turn him into a Marxist."

The film begins with an expressionistic sequence in a mine where young miners walk in the dark tunnels, the beams from their flashlights reflecting off the wet walls and from pools of water, to the accompaniment of the stark, lonely sound of slowly dripping water. The sound carries over to a travel inside the changing rooms where helmets and waterproof gear hang in blueish light. Then back into the mines, to what Orwell described in 1937 as "...my own mental picture of hell. Most of the things one imagines in hell are there — heat, noise, confusion, darkness, foul air and above all, unbearably cramped space. Everything except the fire, for there is no fire down there..."

From there, the film moves back up to the kitchens, taverns and picket lines, wherever miners congregate. There, we find scenes of great emotional impact; a young miner looks



Attracting his audience by putting a human face on the issues.
A Chilean miner in *La Richesse Des Autres*

at his father who has spent thirty of his fifty years in the mines, "I look at you, dad, and I have to say it, you're finished." The young miner then turns to his wife and asks, "What am I going to be like at 40?"

Elsewhere, a young miner, about to be married, talks of the difficulty of maintaining relations with his future wife when he spends most of his day doing back-breaking work in the mines. He decides to quit the mines in favor of a normal life. In one of the last scenes, an old miner sitting around a camp-fire lists the diseases that plague him as a result of mining; cellicose, arthritis, bronchitis and alcoholism. He switches to listing with pride the trinkets the company has awarded him for not having accidents: a copper ashtray, a knife and a belt that reads "4,000 shifts." He concludes, "It makes me sad... I would have liked to have had a life like the others."

These scenes are bracketed by union rallies, speeches denouncing the injustices and the visit to Chile. The film concludes with the song-chant, "It's only the beginning, continue the struggle," over a montage of the miner's marriage, Québec and Chilean miners trading songs and jigs and a union congress in the Forum. It is an exhaustive work with a solid direction to follow, a balance well kept and as a result, a textural integrity from beginning to end.

Unfortunately, this is not the case with **Les Gars Du Tabac**. It is an atmospheric grab-bag of undeveloped themes; intolerance due to racism, transient versus sedentary life styles and conflicting work ethics. To the accompaniment of some blues by the group Offenbach, the camera tracks — in languid long shots — youths hitch-hiking, looking for work, loitering in Delhi's town park. There are snippets of work on the fields, youths being beaten up at night, a choir in the park, authorities shrugging responsibility. But the total does not add up to much.

Bulbulian himself calls it a film "in passing". It was originally set to be part of a larger work called **Le Temps Des Fêtes** which was to contrast the St-Jean festivities with the daily lives of people caught up in another kind of reality; a waitress in the Laurentians, the wives of United Aircraft strikers and the youths in Ontario tobacco fields. But, once the material had been shot, it did not hold its own; the approach was deemed too artificial. As a consequence, **Les Gars Du Tabac** was released, perhaps in desperation.

It is unfortunate that it had to be so, for the film holds the seed of a documentary that would have brought home a situation one usually associates with migrant workers in the U.S., a racism which has, in the past, led to lynchings in Ontario. But the film is but an embryo brought to term too quickly.

What perhaps motivates Bulbulian to put his craft at the disposal of the underdog is the awareness that, now more than ever, he and his colleagues are in danger of extinction, that the kind of documentary that, up to now, he has made is faced with insurmountable difficulties, especially economic restrictions.

"I refuse to make sponsored films. They are not what they used to be; companies are more and more conscious of the nature of the mass media. When Flaherty made **Louisiana Story** for Carnegie, he was able to make a film and not propaganda. Now, that kind of thing is impossible... People have distorted Malraux's Cinema, it is an art but it is also an industry by over emphasizing the word 'industry'. It's through the economy that they have us by the balls.

24/Cinema Canada



La P'tite Bourgogne's social hierarchy: Mayor Drapeau at the top, the peasants at the bottom and the artists in the middle

"The present crisis in Québec cinema exists solely on the level of an economic system that is being imposed on Canada; everywhere, creativity is being strangled at the base. In our society, filmmakers, along with poets, are those who have the least access to the public and who are the least heard.

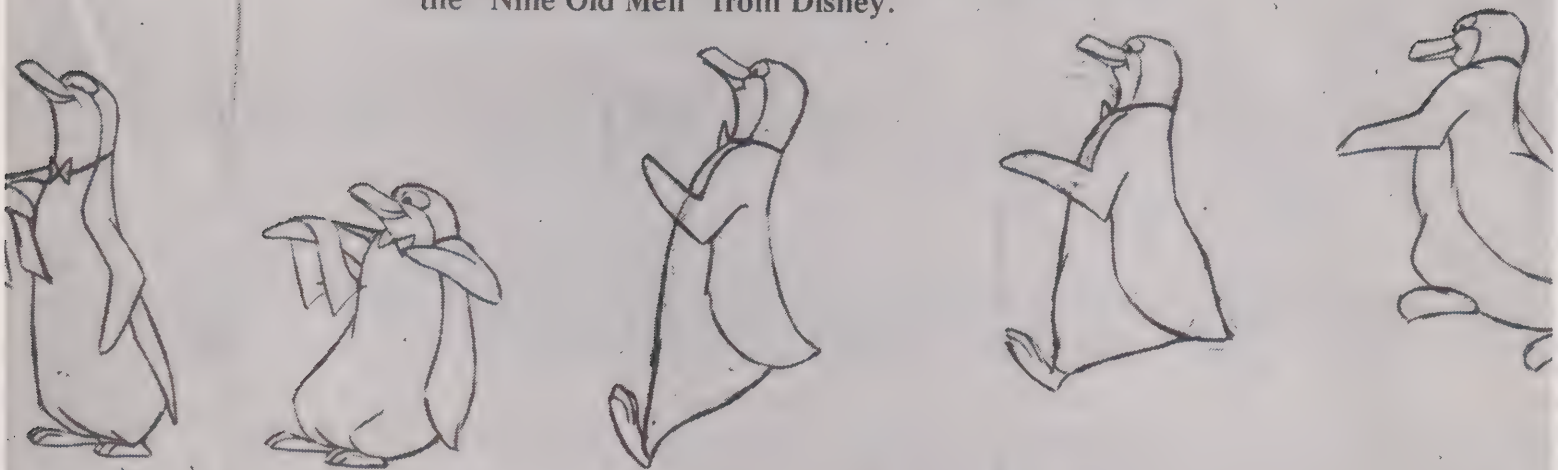
"There's a whole generation of filmmakers right behind us to whom we throw nickels and dimes to fight over so they can finish a little film. These artisans are filmmakers in the real sense of the word. The politicians talk about conserving our heritage and go ape over an 18th century wrought-iron plaque while there are a hundred filmmakers who aren't allowed to work. That, they don't care about."

Without becoming a knight in shining armor, one is assured that Bulbulian and others like him, will continue to fight for what he believes, not only for himself, but for his subjects as well.

"There are alternatives to the government's opinion and public opinion has been deformed by polls and statistics. The system has developed a way of transmitting messages and I have developed, in cooperation with my subjects, a way of transmitting messages which are often in contradiction with those of the government... There was a big stink raised in Parliament over the \$150,000 that was spent on **La Richesse Des Autres**, that public funds were spent to publicize problems in the mining industry. Well, during that time, Noranda Co. made six or seven commercials at \$50,000 each... I think that, in a democratic society where freedom of speech supposedly exists, it is only just and normal that, if Noranda can spend \$300,000 to publicize its opinions, miners are entitled to \$150,000 from the government to give their own diverging opinion. In that context, it is essential that the miner's opinion be as well organized as possible. It is not enough to shove a microphone in front of somebody just because it is his opinion; he has a right to as many fades and dissolves as Noranda."

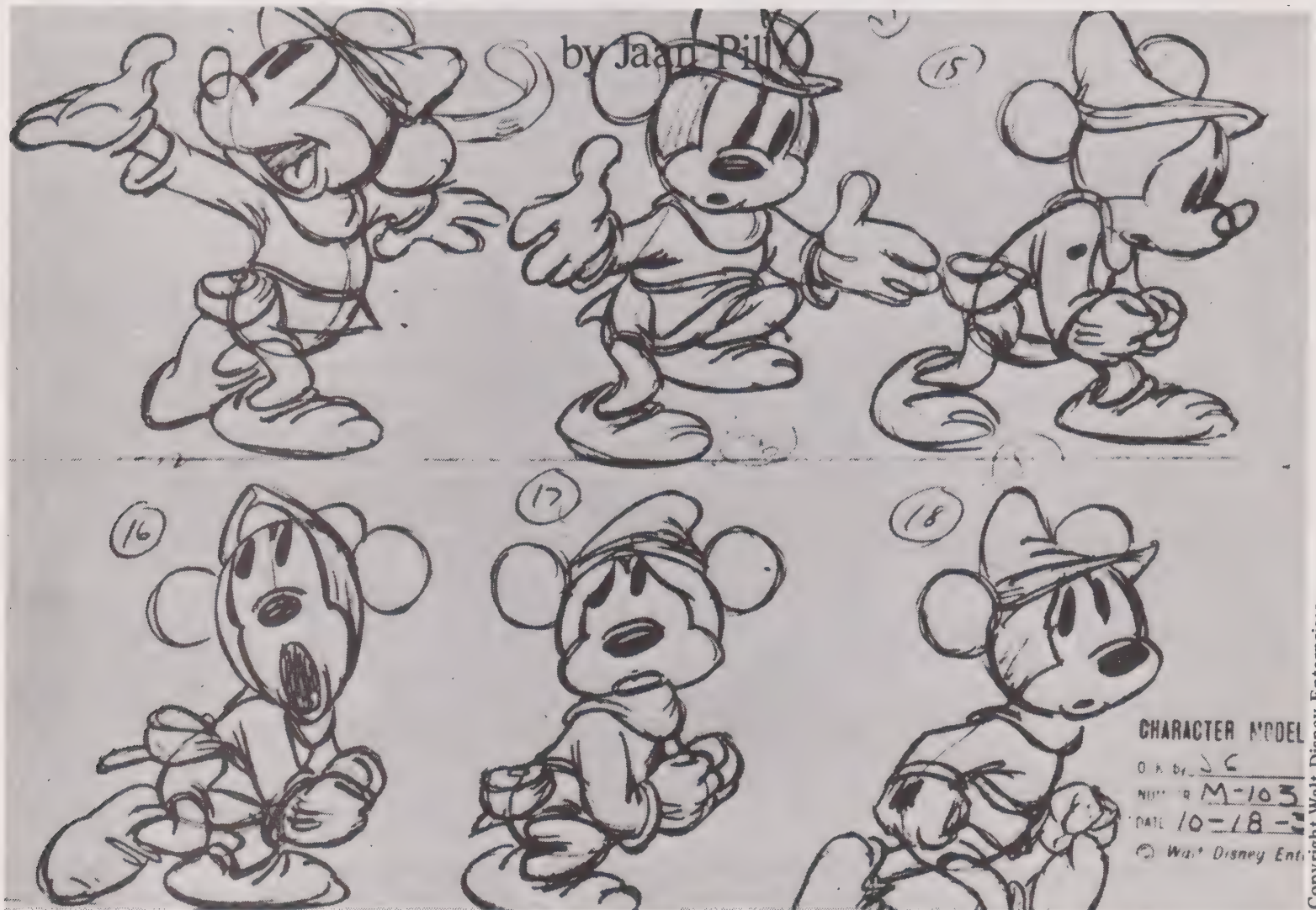
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If you want to know what the guidelines were that every Disney animator had thumbtacked over his desk and followed while drafting up such characters as the svelt Mickey and his dainty Minnie Mouse, read Jaan Pill's report on a seminar given by two of the "Nine Old Men" from Disney.



106 **disney** 97 95 animation

An example of squash and stretch helping to give life to a character



CHARACTER MODEL
O.K. by J.C.
M-103
DATE 10-18-25
© Walt Disney Ent.

Freddy Moore's Mickey for "The Brave Little Taylor: "The best shaped Mickeys that we've had," says Johnston

August 1978/25

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Recently retired Disney animators Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston, the last active members of the original Nine Old Men, hand-picked by Walt Disney to head up his studio's animation department, came to Toronto late in February for a week-long visit (February 27 – March 3) to Nelvana Limited, producers of *A Cosmic Christmas*.

The visit was jointly sponsored by Nelvana and the Ontario Arts Council. It was arranged by Nelvana as a means of encouraging professional development among its animators, who are currently completing production on Nelvana's new TV special, *The Devil and Daniel Mouse*.

The program included a series of lectures at Nelvana on the use of characters (with illustrations of characterization from *Snow White* and other Disney films), as well as on staging, scene-planning and putting it all together.

Much has been written about the impact of Walt Disney films around the world. The Disney approach has been criticized in the past for reducing whatever it touched such as folk tales and literary classics, into the limited frame of reference that the Disney Studio could understand, through the process of "Disneyfication". The recent lecture-demonstrations by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston at Nelvana Limited, however, did not deal with this aspect of Walt Disney and Mickey Mouse.

Instead, the duo presented a clear and lively outline of the procedures which animators at the Studio developed in the last 45 years in creating the Disney animated shorts and features.

The gist of the first Thomas-Johnston lecture, concerning the use of characters, was that the old-time Disney animators were aware, at all times, that what went into individual drawings would eventually turn up in the mind of the viewer. They also made a point of reaching out and grabbing the audience with strong statements which carefully controlled its attention.

In the course of the lectures Thomas and Johnston made it clear that the connection between individual drawings, scenes and sequences on the one hand, and the viewer's mind on the other, is less easily achieved than might be expected. Among the obstacles is old-fashioned artistic self-indulgence. Another is lack of precise intentions.

Of the first of these problems, Ollie Johnston commented, "One of the dangers we find is that you fall in love with yourself, or your drawing, and it's easy to say too much, and lose your audience, by trying to make it too complicated."

Johnston said the answer to this problem is to stop trying to tell the viewer too many things: Instead "Let them see only what you want them to see. Like a magician. He only shows what you're supposed to see. He doesn't complicate it. It is not how great you are or how funny you can be. It is just what the scene is in the picture for."

The second obstacle, lack of precise intentions, is more subtle. As Frank Thomas remarked, "Everything you draw is going to mean something to the audience; sometimes it just means that they're confused, and they think, 'What's he trying to say?' But everything you do is communicated. So you'd better put up there what you want them to see. You want to tell them just what you want them to know, and nothing else."

With these two major obstacles out of the way, how does the animator make the connection between the drawings and the viewer's mind? The connection is made through symbols which operate on a number of different levels. As Johnston remarked, the intended message in a Disney film is constructed in the audience's imagination through the use of symbols which the audience will readily recognize and accept.

For example, the cartoonist uses a standard lexicon of symbols of facial expression and posture to depict a wide range (and the subtle gradations) of emotions. Another level of non-verbal communication involves "acting symbols" in which specified variations in ways of moving tell an audience something about different characters.

Thomas demonstrated the role of acting symbols with the example of how different characters would throw away a piece of paper. The paper can be dropped casually, or as if it's very precious, or in the different ways a person who is near-sighted, arrogant or sneaky, drops it.

A variation of acting symbols is found in the symbolism associated with a character's movement toward or away from the camera. After a screening of *The Ugly Duckling* during the first lecture, Thomas noted, for example, how the main character went off over the horizon when it was sad. "I've always wondered," he said, "they go off over the horizon when they're sad. They never climb uphill, they never come towards you, they always go away, and down. They never go away uphill, either. You try it sometime, the only one that really works for you is you go away and go down. That's a feeling of depression. It's symbolic."

In the first lecture Thomas and Johnston presented the Nelvana audience a list of 14 points drawn up 45 years ago by Freddy Moore, one of the top early Disney animators, which Disney animators used to put above their drawing tables, one item per day, as things to keep in mind in establishing that connection with the audience. The quotations which follow are from Frank Thomas unless otherwise noted.

* First, does it have appeal? Is it something that you want to look at?

* Is the staging based on a unity of ideas? For example, has a consistent eye direction been figured out in a scene which depicts several characters? Do the characters read as a unit while maintaining individual personalities?

* Is this the most interesting way to do it? "Would anyone look at it besides your mother?"

* Is this the most entertaining way to do it? "It's easy to do too much. You can always be funnier, and so you keep trying to be funnier and finally you've done too much and you've lost the point of the scene." (On the other hand, added Thomas, sometimes the scene needs that extra touch that makes it sparkle.)

* Are you in character? "Is this the way the character would do it and no other character?"

* Are you advancing the character? "Are you repeating things you've already done? Let people know your character gradually. Pick one characteristic that works best for each scene." (Other pointers from the duo: Don't use up all the most interesting traits right away; usually there are at least six traits to each personality; and it often takes two or three sequences to establish a character.)

* Is this the simplest statement? Don't cover up the scene with useless action, and "Know what you're trying to put



Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas, the last of the Nine Old Men

over because otherwise you'll never be able to judge whether you've done it."

* Is the story-point clear? "Why is this scene in the picture? You usually fall in love with the drawings you are making... and you forget what you were supposed to be doing."

* Is the secondary action working with the main action? Ollie Johnston gave the example of an expression getting lost if it's combined with simultaneous movement across the screen: "You've got to take the time in your scene to show the change from one expression to the other. You have got to take the time to do it so the audience can read it."

* Is the presentation the best for the medium? "You are in a crude medium. There is no way of getting the refinement, the delicacy you'd like to get. You cannot get shading worth anything... So it is even more reason to make your drawings simple and strong."

* Are you being too special? Thomas remarked that prettiness alone won't hold an audience beyond ten minutes. "You can dazzle them for ten minutes and then you are going to lose them, because nobody can take it longer than that, unless they are high on something."

* Do you have two-dimensional clarity? Is it easy to read? Does it look good with the background? Is the silhouette clear? One way to test it is to take the drawing and color it in.

* Do you have three-dimensional clarity? Does your drawing retain its solidity as it turns? Is there space between volumes? Are the characters standing on the floor plane? Since drawings can creep up as you work on a scene, it is sometimes useful to use a grid for a floor plane to keep them anchored.

* Do you have four-dimensional clarity? This refers to continuity over time. "The shapes change as they move," said Johnston, "and you get the squashing and the stretching, and that has to happen at the right place and the right time. If you don't do enough of it, it is stiff; too much and it is squishy."

Thomas and Johnston discussed other points as well -- especially the value of mentally rehearsing each scene before acting it out on paper.

"One of our biggest problems with the young guys," Johnston said, "is to keep them from picking up their pen-

cils the minute they get the scene. In other words they want to start moving the character around right away. One of our top animators from the old days taught us that it is much better if you sit there, for half the time: say you had a scene that was going to take you two days to do; if you would sit there and think about it for one day, you would animate it just as fast as if you drew for two days and made a lot of mistakes."

Throughout their lectures, the Disney duo emphasized the role mental imagery plays in developing a character. Thomas remarked that it is easy to talk about how the animator must know the character's thoughts and feelings, but that sometimes you go through a scene and you haven't shown it and have shown something else instead.

Another topic was dialogue. Johnston said, "It is important that dialogue is not used as a crutch. What you are trying to do is express thoughts with this. You want to phrase your dialogue so that you don't move the guys so much that you cannot see the attitude that you are expressing."

"In other words you are not just illustrating words; you are illustrating thoughts and ideas... the way the character walks, stands, sits and listens will reveal the meaning of his words. This requires... the ability to make the character come to life for the audience by action as well as words. What we strive for is acting, not action. I think that is very important. You are not just moving guys; you are trying to make them act, and that includes every drawing in your scene, not just the key poses... they have all got to have that feeling of acting."

After the lecture, I asked Nelvana's Clive Smith about his studio's response to the Californians' visit. He said it was a real treat, "There is so little of this kind of animation being done anymore. You almost think you are working in a void. In a sense we are because there is such an enormous age gap between the people of Frank and Ollie's generation, who started this and developed it... and the people who are doing it now."

"Most people are doing the Saturday morning stuff, because they are either not willing to risk the kind of money that is involved in full production, or they are just not interested. For the two generations to meet like this I think is an incredible thing. It is really going to be one of the few opportunities to pass on any of this kind of thing first hand." □

animated reflections

Montreal's loss is the West Coast's gain as Wally Gentleman, one of Canada's most talented special effects designers and cameramen, follows the sun and his fortunes to B.C. Below, he describes a front projection system for self-matting animated cartoon characters which he developed recently for Disada Productions.

by Wally Gentleman

Many years have passed since I first advocated, through the pages of earlier issues of *Cinema Canada*, the possibilities of Front Screen Projection at the miniature screen size level for techniques such as standard cartoon cel animation rostrum cinematography. At that time a pioneering application of the system was made possible through the sprayed application of the contents of an aerosol bomb of Reflectolite to a piece of art board serving as a reflective screen. Commercially sold by the 3-M Company, Reflectolite was considered a boon to homeowners who were advised to spray the solution to the trunks of trees on their property that might present a potential night hazard to those drivers seeking to find their garage entrances after a night out on the town.

The principle was that the light from the headlights of their cars, on striking the patches of Reflectolite on the tree, would be returned from those spots at a far greater intensity than the beams of light incident upon them. From the bleary eyeline of the driver the spots of Reflectolite would be very bright since his eyes, very approximately, would be near the level of the car headlight source. The paint having a reflectance value of, at that time, 200 times brighter than that which would be reflected from a tree painted with a flat white paint, would

flash a timely reminder of the possibilities of a dented fender.

Having previously experimented (as a logical extension to in-camera visual effects) with a high grain beaded projection screen in exploring the possibility of front screen projection through a semi-surfaced mirror placed at 45 degrees to the camera-object lens axis, it seemed highly probable that the tiny plastic spheres suspended within the 3-M medium would perform the function of returning rays of light incident on them to the source with far greater optical efficiency; and so it proved to be. The tests conducted then, both with live artists and cel mounted cut-outs demonstrated a practical application that was to culminate in the huge 120 by 50 foot screen mosaic and plate projection of **2001: A Space Odyssey**.

Many uses have been found for the 3-M high-grain screen material. It has steadily improved from the early days of aerosol bomb encapsulation to cans of the prepared solution for brush or spray application in different colors. The material lends itself to much creative enterprise. An actor wearing a waistcoat of it will appear to have a hole through him through which the background is seen. Hands can be coated for a mysterious glow or eyes can be made to flash different colors when the material is imbedded in contact lenses. The material used for general motion picture work is an adhesive-backed roll marketed under the name of "Scotchlite". It is a reflex reflecting material bearing the number 7610 High Intensity Reflective sheeting. It now has a reflectance exceeding by 600 times that of a flat matte white surface. This virtue allows for consid-

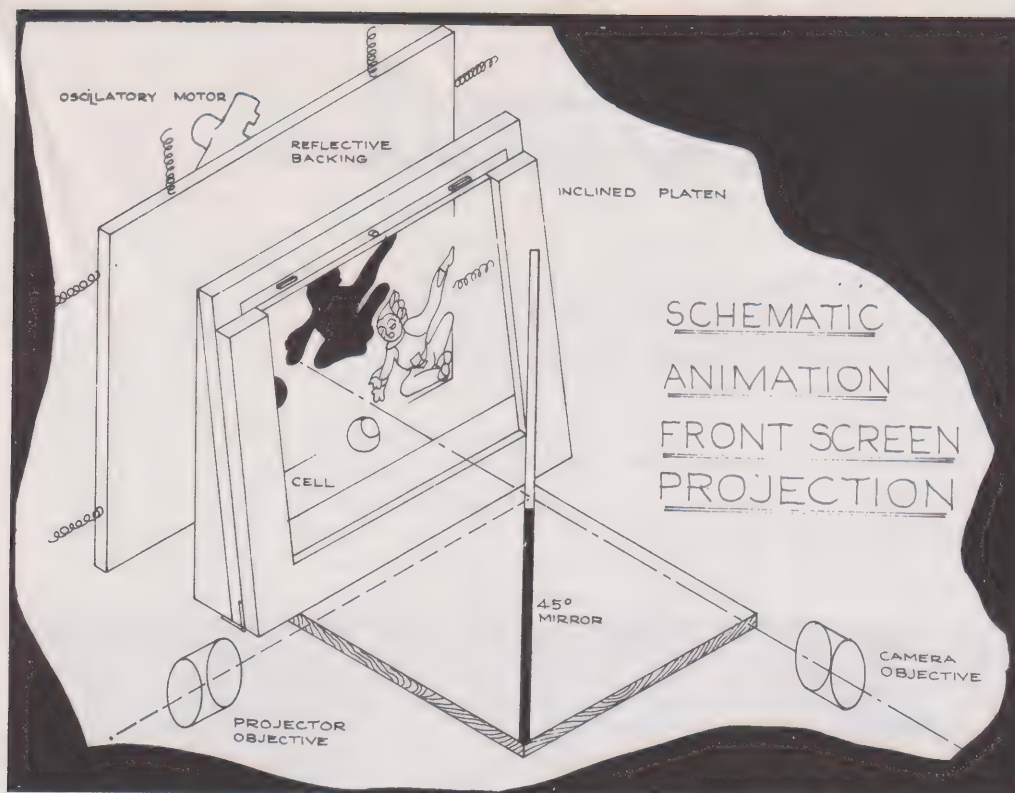
erable flexibility in the choice of a diaphragm setting for front screen process work and the choice invariably leads to more aperture closure for a greater depth of field.

It has also led to process projection work that utilises low intensity light sources and it has become feasible to supply a photographic background to an action via a simple Carousel slide projector. The continual improvement of Kodak photographic motion picture film, the higher ASA ratings and finer grain raw stock have all moved toward creating better opportunity for process activities via the 3-M reflecting material.

Another opportunity to confirm the versatility of the method was found when Disada Productions Ltd. of Montreal was contracted to produce a quality film combining live-action and full personality animation while respecting a modest budget. There are many ways of producing photographic mattes to permit immediate or subsequent image combination, some calling for highly exotic mechanisms and processes of varying complexity often radical in cost of time, labor and materials. To circumvent the latter, a front projection apparatus was commissioned by the Disada Studios by its President, Peter Adamakos. It consisted of a stop-frame 35mm process projector, an evaporated metallic-coated front surface mirror of 50 percent transmission, 30 percent reflectance and a 28 x 20 inch rectangle of 3-M material mounted to a background of 3/4 inch plywood suspended on a nylon elastic.

All this assembly was rigidly contained in a framework of bolted Dexion

Wally Gentleman, veteran cameraman, is president of Speac, a special effects company. Among his credits are many of the effects in 2001: Space Odyssey. An active member of the Society of Filmmakers, serving as president for several years, he has recently moved from Montreal to British Columbia.



for the utmost stability and erected in an entirely black painted room to eliminate any spurious reflections of objects in the glass and mirror surfaces of the apparatus.

It was to be expected that when the camera was framed to field a standard animation cel the source light of the projector would be seen in the immediate centre of the frame. By laying back the vertical platen fifteen degrees this reflection was eliminated completely. The slope also assisted the positioning of the cel bearing the cartoon subject on the top peg bar. Each cel for photography had to be pressed flat by gating the two glass platen surfaces into close contact. This normal action for cel photography was doubly important for the front projection cel photography since any ripples in the cel surface brought about inconsistent areas of reflection of the projection source light. It was also found that only the best quality manufacture in cel fabrication was permissible since any striation, scratches or such major imperfections were immediately evident as cast shadows on the background, picture projected via the mirror through the cel.

The quality of the reproduction was preserved through the use of 35mm original cinematography of the live backgrounds carefully exposed at a 2 to 1 lighting ratio with the full knowledge that the reproduction process to 16mm would entail a contrast

increase to the original. The pre-edited film in its entirety was committed to a carefully color-balanced print step-printed by Film Opticals (Québec) Ltd. to ensure ultimate registration to circumvent any possible movement of the background picture against the intended foreground action.

Under the supervision of William Byers, head of Disada Productions' Technical Department, rotoscoping of the background for determination of the points in the scene where animated characters were to be located was arranged by replacing the reflective screen background with a fixed pane of glass equipped with regular Acme animation pegs. The glass was set in the precise plane that the reflective background material was to be suspended so that the projected image for rotoscoping was the exact size as that positioned for combination photography. The difference in perspective distortion of the animated character and the background by reason of the inclined platen was checked and remedied in execution by pegging a field guide to the platen pegs and an identical field guide to the rotoscope glass panel where the difference due to distortion was easily perceived from the rear cast shadow of the platen guide.

The lighting of the cel was made from directly overhead. Again, the inclination of the platen from the vertical was exploited to catch the light of a 2K directed downwards upon it

through a lamp polarizing filter. By rotating another optical polarizing filter set on the camera lens, it was possible to balance the lighting of the animation cel against the front-projected background and to control diffusion haze. The slight color shift occasioned by the use of the polarized filter and mirror plus glass panels was adjusted by a color-corrected filter addition in the light path of the stop-frame projector. For a half second of exposure per frame, the wattage of the projection light rested at a low 150W.

The combination of slow camera speed and a high grain screen in close proximity to the cartoon cel permitted an exceedingly sharp shadow of the animated cel to be cast onto the reflective screen. Correspondingly, the camera lens could be diaphragmed for a maximum depth of field to hold the cartoon cel and the rear projected background for maximum resolution.

By this means no backing had to be applied to the cel cartoon image to provide additional masking, and background and foreground were simultaneously exposed while taking advantage of the quality inherent in a print-down process from a 35mm original to a 16mm original negative.

Consideration was given to the possibility that the grain structure of the 3-M material would be discernible in the finished copy due to such close-up photography, and provision was made to eliminate the possibility. The reflective screen was held in suspension but permitted one inch of travel latitude in a north, south, east, and west direction. No tolerance was permitted in a forward or backward vertical plane. A variac controlled electric motor was attached to the hanging screen and by this means the entire screen was entered into single plane oscillation during the period of frame exposure. The resultant image blur of the screen grain would, itself, eliminate the grain structure without affecting the resolution of the picture image.

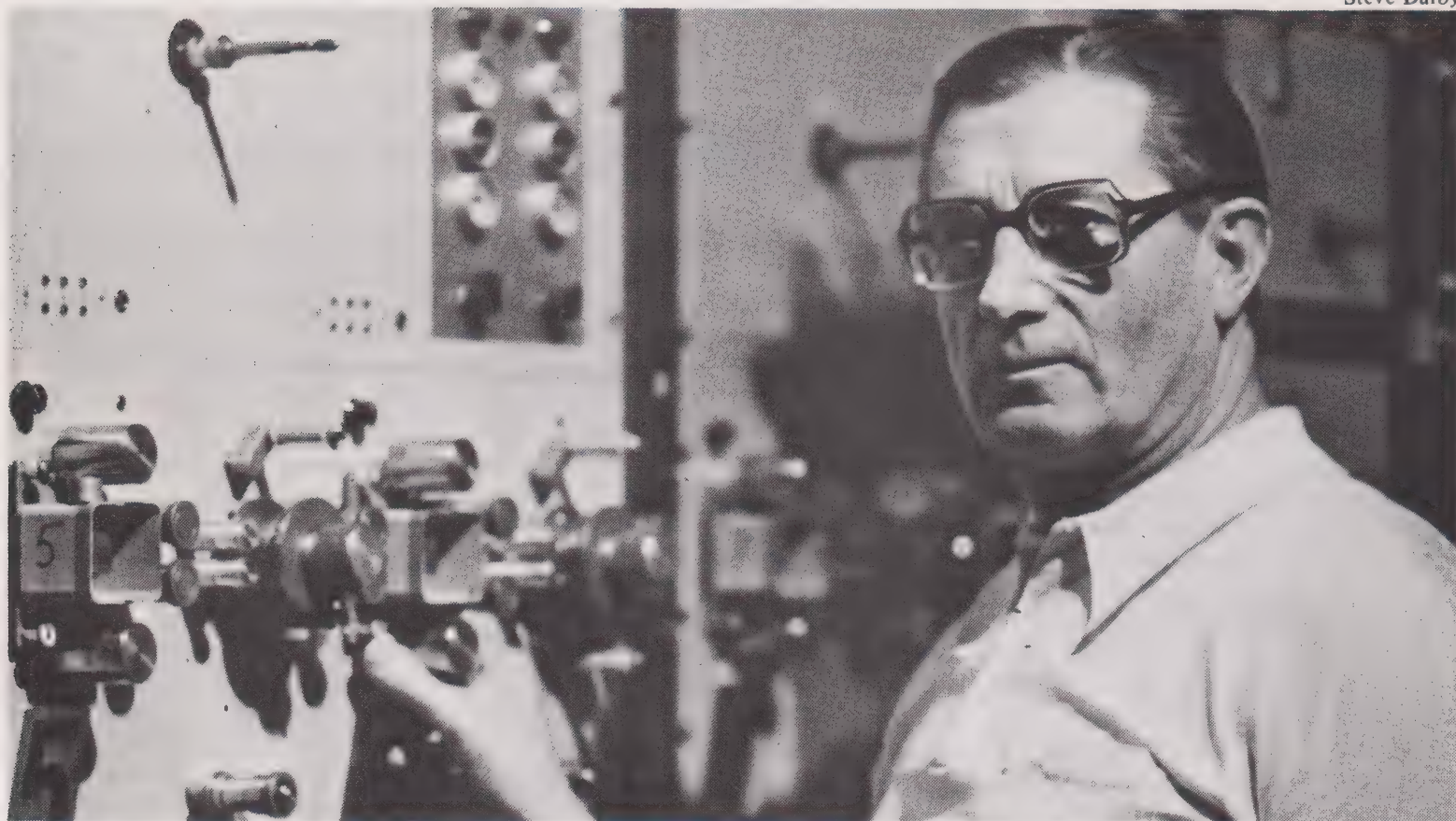
A further advantage of the system was the possibility of immediate visual checks between foreground artwork and background action, as the cinematography was in progress. It was also of good advantage to dupe the entire film rather than attempt to intercut laboratory dupes with the combination scenes exposed on the process projection set-up. The photographic unity was preserved from titles to end credits. □

dalby sound

Although we think of film as being primarily a visual experience, sound is essential. Here Steve Dalby, the man behind the scenes, speaks about his work as a professional sound mixer and film teacher.

by Lois Siegel

Steve Dalby



When Steve Dalby was 18, an old lady friend of the family told him, "If you want to get on in this world, you've got to get into radio."

So Steve got a job with His Master's Voice, the Gramophone company in England now called EMI (Electrical and Musical Industries).

Then the old lady said, "Get in anywhere, and then make a nuisance of yourself."

Steve got into the recording department, examining the matrixes (record masters) that records are pressed from, and then he made a nuisance of himself. Eventually he was transferred from one section to another, and each time his job became more interesting.

Steve Dalby has been working with sound ever since. In Canada he is best known for his work as a sound mixer and head of the Sound Department for Bellevue Pathé Quebec Inc., 1973-1977.

Steve has worked with some of the film industry's best known directors: Roman Polanski, Richard Lester, Tony Richardson, Joseph Losey, Ted Kotcheff, Jan Kadar and Jean-Pierre Lefebvre... on some of the best known films: *The Loneliness of a Long Distance Runner*, *Tom Jones*, *The Loved One*, *A Hard Day's Night*, *Repulsion*, *The Knack*, *Help*, *Cul de Sac*, *Alfie*, *Accident*, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *Lies My Father Told Me*, *Les Dernières Fiançailles*.

In England when radio first began, His Master's Voice was also involved with a film company. His Master's Voice wanted to put their Gramophone recording artists into films, but opera singers at that time were as broad as they were long and couldn't act and the film company of course didn't like

Lois Siegel writes, photographs, teaches and makes experimental films in Montreal.

30/Cinema Canada

the idea one bit. They tried one film about the life of Robert Burns which was a ghastly failure.

As a result, the two companies split up — but Steve had been inflamed by the glamour of the film industry.

In 1930 he became a sound camera operator and maintenance engineer at British International Pictures. At that time there was no Nagra for recording and sound was recorded onto a separate photographic film.

Afterwards he moved to Ealing Studios-Associated Talking Pictures Ltd. to record sound on location. "In those days people didn't teach you. I worked on my own observing what other people did."

Steve now teaches at Concordia University, lecturing on the technical aspects of film production, especially sound.

"The main problem with teaching sound is that one can't get enough practical work. You can't really teach sound by talking about it. Concordia is well equipped, if not the best equipped school in Canada. But much more time should be spent with the students actually doing recording, which means shooting with a camera. It's no good just recording sound because you haven't got the problems of camera/sound recording: the microphone has to be in a certain position because the camera is showing a certain amount of the set and the actors are moving around. It comes back to the old problem of finance.

"But some arrangements should be made to have the students shoot films while the sound lecturer is there with them, which means the school should employ the instructor for much more than one lecture a week.

"In this way the lecturer wouldn't always have to say, 'Well, what did you do there? That sound isn't very good.' And the student wouldn't be stuck with bad sound.

"Students seem very keen to learn, but time is a problem. Students often miss lectures to shoot films. The whole course method should be restructured.

"Although I learned sound in the industry, I think now I would suggest that someone start in a school. You must know how to operate the equipment. Companies are loath to spend too much time teaching. They feel they are paying people to do a job, not to teach them to do a job. Logically, clients won't accept people experimenting on their expensive productions. A client wants the best, and the amount he's paying warrants having good people."

Steve values a good memory. "A sound mixer has to know what one did at the beginning of the roll. With the advent of the rock and roll method in 1956, the mixer, through electrical circuits in the recording amplifier, could punch in and out of a roll to make a slight alteration without hearing changes in the sound. Therefore, he had to know the sound level where he left off or a change would be heard between sounds.

"I never believe in taking a lot of notes. I always try to remember things, and this is probably how one acquires a good memory — by making the brain work.

"In the early days of magnetic recording one could record an entire roll and if it wasn't good, it could be erased and used again, but before magnetic recording we would record directly onto an optical sound track, and it was very difficult to learn how to mix. We used to rehearse a 35mm, 10 minute reel of film for two hours and then either take notes or remember everything at various points along the reel. Then we would start recording. If the recording took three takes, the producer started looking for a new mixer."

Dalby on Directors:

Polanski: "He was the most difficult to work with. He's one of those people who never makes up his mind. On *Repulsion* he was constantly sending the reel back to the sound editor to have changes made. Then he'd eventually have the changes replaced with what was there in the first place. But Polanski is very meticulous about the direction of his actors. He knows what he wants visually and the way he wants the dialogue spoken; but from the point of view of building up the sound track, he seems to do it in a rather experimental way."

Lester: "He knows exactly what he wants from the moment he starts the film until the final mix."

Richardson: "He tends to give the impression of accepting other people's ideas, but in the end it's his own conception which comes forth."

Losey: "He has very cut and dried ideas about what he wants. He works a great deal with his sound editor before the mix."

Lefebvre: "He is very sound conscious. His soundman, Jacques Blain, is one of the best location sound recorders in Canada."

Kadar: "He knows exactly what he wants. He's a very experienced and professional filmmaker. People told me he would be difficult. I didn't find him difficult at all."

Although Steve has worked in many countries, he explains that he has mixed in many languages he didn't know, including Hindu.

"One goes by the sound rather than by the language. A mixer must have a good ear and be able to distinguish between sounds. With dialogue you have to assess the difference between recordings of different lots and to equalize the results. Mixing is not just mixing sounds together. The art of the mixer is to make the sound acceptable — one can't always turn bad sound into good sound, but one can make the sound seem as if there were no changes in quality.

"The problem with a novice filmmaker is that he tries to put too many elements on one track. A beginner often says, 'This mix won't be difficult, there are only two tracks.' But a mixer must have space between various sounds to allow fading in and out.

"One thing Canada does lack are professional sound editors.

"Sometimes directors bring me poor sound and expect miracles. I often have to tell them 'I'm a mixer not a miracle worker.'

"They don't understand what I can and can't do with their sound. One can't always eliminate a noisy background. If one does, it sometimes gives a bad quality to the voice mixed with it."

"coming out"

by Natalie Edwards

"Well, where the hell is the Super 8 Revolution!" jeered the professional cinematographer who, ten years ago, had been worried he'd lose work to the advancing technology of the pistol or pocket camera and its ever-ready advocates. "There isn't one, and there never will be!" he cried.

One place to look for signs of a Super 8 revolution is at a Super 8 film festival. There are only a few of them in the world, notably in South America, Spain (where they can be potent revolutionary tools) and England. But one is here in Canada, in Toronto, a thriving three-year affair that this April filled the rooms and halls at Harbourfront, and, according to participants, organizers and the general public, was a runaway success. Again.

The evolution of these first three years of the Super 8 Festival, as the coordinators search for its most effective direction, to some extent parallels the directional shifts in Super 8 itself.

Organized by an active group of teachers and friends at the Ontario College of Art, including John Coull, Richard and Sheila Hill, Scott Didlake and Shalheveth Hillel, it initially set out to find who was out there, what they were up to, and what they wanted to know.

In their introductory article in *Cinema Canada* (No. 25) they stated their original aim:

"We hope that this festival can be a 'coming out' celebration for all S8 filmmakers — a chance to meet other people like themselves, gain production knowledge which will enable everyone to make better films in the future, and to finally see their work portrayed on the big silver screen after years of being played off the basement wall."

That first festival held at the Ontario College of Art, with additional screenings at a downtown theater, was a wild success "with people storming the projection booth trying to get their films screened," as John Coull described it to *The Globe & Mail*.

The organizers found there was indeed an abundance of material and almost fanatical interest in Super 8. Their stated desire "to receive any and all work in S8 format from any and all filmmakers..." released a veritable tidal flood of film. For the next festival it became clear that expanded quarters, a bigger budget and both selectivity in films screened and direction of emphasis would be needed.

Located at Harbourfront, with special Sunday screenings at the New Yorker Theater, the second festival had a healthy budget, good press coverage, and received abundant praise for the non-competitive screenings, the workshop and lectures and the fascinating exhibition of technical advancements. Yet the problem of over-abundance remained.



Julio Neri

Natalie Edwards, Toronto film critic, is president of the Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre and serves on the Board of the Council of Canadian Filmmakers.



Jacques Loquin

"It's a grass roots thing," explained organizer Richard Hill to a *Toronto Star* reporter. "Super 8 is very much a folk art. These things are happening regardless of the film market. There is a lot of raw or semi-raw material you might not otherwise see."

Or want to see. For the difficulty now was how to keep all the channels open and yet not be swamped by inferior, unimaginative, and imitative efforts. In other Super 8 festivals organizers have found only 25 percent — or, in some cases, as low as 5 percent — of the material offered, acceptable. For Super 8 is in many ways a folk art, and like folk music, as Pete Seeger once explained, it "sounds that way because it was made up by the folks."

Ian Birnie, well-known in Toronto for his knowledgeable programming of Art Gallery of Ontario screenings, was in charge of the jury handling submissions. Only about half of the 175 films submitted were programmed over the weekend festival April 14 to 16 this year. Divided into categories "Fact and Documentary", "Home Movie and Diary", "Fiction and Narrative", "Stop Motion and Animation" (only a few here), and "Art and Experimental", they varied in accomplishment. "I was disappointed in the quality of the films submitted," admits Ian, "but the workshops were exciting and suggested all sorts of possibilities the submitted films didn't. Certainly the potential of Super 8 is much larger than the present reality."

Considering the marvelous *sketching* qualities of Super 8, so often lost in an attempt to be sophisticated, Ian commented, "It surprised me how little of the film was really personal. I expected something closer to the psyche, about what goes on in their own room, but found even most of the experimental films influenced by previous 16mm work, and a lot was high-schoolish."

Praising the workshops and the work with the blind and the elderly particularly, Birnie concluded that the Super 8 Festival "mustn't become too elitist but it does need standards", and wondered how the blend of public interest, academic sessions, panels, conferences, workshops and entertaining screenings would work out next year.

That is a chief concern of organizer John Coull as well. The overwhelming response to the festival has allayed fears of failure and replaced them with some hard decisions con-

cerning content and direction. Coull fears the strength of the festival's appeal on an international level, with guests and workshops concerning Super 8 work around the world, may eventually cause some neglect of its original purpose and Canadian aspect. Furthermore, the trade show, a huge success on one level, could expand unduly and turn the festival into "a hobbyist's haven". He'd prefer to see people bring in their own systems, examples of their own inventions, for study and comparison.

And like Birnie, Coull was "not too happy with the quality of the films."

Yet the festival was a marked success; the film screenings after all were only one part of a packed weekend. Available also were the guests and their workshops: Jim Blue with his community documentaries for PBS; Lenny Lipton with his ever-popular 3-D experimentation; Julio Neri, director of the Venezuelan S-8 Festival, with a workshop on features; Jacques Locquin from the Antenne 2 Network in Paris, opening up mind-boggling possibilities with his talk of the over 70 programs he scheduled last year, transferred from Super 8 to video; Suzanne Swibold and her exemplary nature work; Mary Beams talking about rotoscope and animation; Helene Winer from Artists Space Gallery in New York showing the work of three outstanding artists, and many others, as well as two projects of far-reaching possibilities: Bert Stollard's York Communescope, a senior citizens project, and Doug Eliuk's NFB project on Super 8 for the Blind.

On top of all this there was the well-organized and flourishing mini trade exhibit, with Sankyo and Kodak, Atelier S8 and Beaulieu, Filmsonic, Chinon, Magnet One, PS Production Services, Halmar, Toronto Camera and Henry's among those striving for the attention and education of the Super 8 fan in a kind of huckster's heaven of screens and mikes and machinery.

The 1978 Super 8 Festival exposed the best and worst of current Super 8 trends. Over the weekend the large crowd which drifted between screenings, lectures, workshops, and in and out of the trade fair, represented a 100 percent growth over last year's registration, according to director Sheila Hill. Next year's dates in April and the location (Harbourfront has donated its facilities again) are set, but the balance of content and emphasis is not. This may be the year the dedicated hobbyists and amateurs take their films off to the Canadian International Amateur Film Festival competition, and the Super 8 concentrates on advanced techniques, original material, and the inventive uses of this most adaptable medium of expression.

Obviously if the festival is not to be swamped by its success, the acceptance of 'any and all' films must be replaced by strict selectivity and tough decisions made about the overall purpose and direction of the event. Next year can further the exploration not of the Super 8 'revolution', but of the evolution of Super 8.

Amateur enthusiasts should also note the CIAFF, the Canadian International Amateur Film Festival (director, Mrs. Betty Peterson, 4653 Dundas Street West, Islington, Ontario M9A 1A4) and local film clubs like The Toronto Movie Club (P.O. Box 1224, Postal Station A, Toronto) which encourage work on all levels.

For more information on the Super 8 Festival, contact Sheila Hill, Room 16, 43 Victoria Street, Toronto, or call 367-0590. □

enter public ?

by Jane Dick

Despite all predictions, Montréal's 16mm Festival has survived another year. In the following article Jane Dick gives a quick survey of the fest and reviews two films that premiered there.

Approximately 2000 people saw films this year at the Montreal International Festival of Cinema in 16mm, April 26 – May 3. This was the seventh such festival organized by the Coopérative des cinéastes indépendants, and following in an ever-increasingly depressing tradition, their scant financial support was further minimized this year – make that close to nil. Nevertheless the coordinators of the Festival, Dimitri Eipides and Claude Chamberland of the Centre du Cinéma Parallèle, organized their showiest festival in years. Posters and programs were plastered all over the city, an attractive booklet was printed up, and films were shown in two locations – the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts and the Cinéma Parallèle.

Screenings at each theatre were staggered to allow for travelling time between locales, making it possible for festival-goers to see all of the films, something other festival organizers might keep in mind.

Twenty-nine films were presented from around the globe, nine of them Canadian. Many of the films had their Canadian première at the Festival. As in past years the films ranged from short to feature-length, from the out-

right experimental – James Scott's **Coilin and Platonida** (England and West Germany), and Antoinetta Angelidi's **Variations sur le Même Sujet (Ideesdies Fixesirae)** (Greece/France) – to the tried and true documentaries like **Damase Breton, Cordonnier** by Léo Plamondon of the National Film Board.

Such films were offered as Jon Jost's **Angel City** (USA), a sometimes witty, frequently early-Godardian exploration; Larry Clark's **Passing Through** (USA), a powerful drama and testament to the spirit of black music; **Dolly Cake** by Michael Jones (Canada), a madcap, bizarre little story of a housewife and her household 'guests'; and **Marika and Marevna** (England) by Jana Bokova, a marvellously refreshing documentary on two aging women, artist, daughter and mother respectively.

Several first films were presented – among them Tibor Takacs' remarkable **Metal Messiah** (Canada) and Mary Stephen's stunningly photographed **Ombres de Soie** (Canada).

From Australia came Stephen Wallace's **Love Letters from Teralba Road**, a film of unrelieved and deadly depression but fascinating because of the acting performances which gave one the uncanny feeling of being privy to reality.

On the whole the production values and imagination of the documentaries presented were consistently high while the other films ranged widely in technical quality (often due to lack of funds) and though wildly imaginative, were not always successful in realising their own ambitions.

Whether or not the festival this year was 'successful' is difficult to assess – everything can always be better – but it was well-received by those in attendance and offered a wide cross-section of interesting and thought-provoking independent films. One major flaw – not utilizing artists that were present. For example, Tibor Takacs was introduced as being available for discussion after the screening of **Metal Messiah** but was whisked away without a word as soon as the lights went up, leaving a huge question mark hanging over a bewildered audience. Certainly, dialogue between artists and their public is important and this opportunity should have been exploited. It could only be an asset to a festival that admittedly needs a helping hand.

Details of next year's festival are of course not yet available but the hard work of planning and soliciting funds and films is already underway. The determination and the films are there. Enter public?

Tibor Takacs' METAL MESSIAH

d. Tibor Takacs, sc. Stephen Zoller, narr. Jean Paul Young, ph. Joseph L. Sutherland, ed. Tibor Takacs, sd. ed. Tibor Takacs, sd. rec. Peter Chapman, Mike Hoogenboom, a.d. Tibor Takacs/Stephen Zoller, m. Dana/Clement/Moses (original music), l.p. Jean Paul Young, Richard Allen, David Jensen, exec. p. Don Jean Louis, p. Tibor Takacs/Stephen Zoller/J. L. Sutherland, 1977, col. 16 mm, running time 75 minutes.

One hopes, always, when sitting down to a 'first' film, to be treated to a real stunner — one that is daring, brash, and innovative. One expects a first film to be flawed. But one is scarcely prepared for Tibor Takacs' **Metal Messiah** which is bursting at both seams.

It is an impressive first film — stylish, energetic, and technically of a consistently high quality. It is a film of striking images, intelligent humor and some very real human agonies. It also has serious shortcomings.

The film begins in an intriguing manner. An awesomely large headlight curves around the screen, heralding the arrival of a train into a lonely darkened station. It is March 17, 1983. We are in Anywhere City, a place where appearance and reality coincide, and we are slowly introduced to the characters, beginning with our narrator, Philip Chandler: A Detective from the Neon Past. "Most people around here go insane," he informs us drily as we leave the train station to cruise the late-night city streets.

The film — how does one say? — grabs you.

What is it about? Briefly: a Metal Man (who has all the presence of a David Bowie gone through the wringer) comes to earth, is given power in the form of a guitar, made into a rock star, and crucified. But what the film is *about*, ultimately, is not so clear.

It's a clever hodgepodge of several film genres and familiar media culture from film noir to Fellini, from *A Clockwork Orange* to *Dodes Ka Den*, from German expressionism to TV commercials, from the classic to the punk. Takacs has managed to use all his borrowings to advantage as well as paying them witty homage. He also manages somehow to pull these widely-



Metal Messiah by Tibor Takacs

divergent ingredients into an inevitable, but not necessarily coherent, whole.

Certainly, in one sense, the film is fun to watch — to discover the multi-levels of reference in operation at any one time. It's a lively film, obviously made by someone who loves film with a passion. Unfortunately, in his fervour Takacs has taken too many lovers to bed at one time — as a viewer I did not regret any *one* presence, but each was paid only passing due.

Takacs' experience has been in commercials and it shows. He has a flair for the short-term, and a vibrancy that is exciting. But he is not able to sustain the drama he purports to be filming. The film is episodic — each segment more urgent than the last. But building to what, and why?

The narration, which opened the film and followed it a short ways on, dribbles off somewhere along the way, taking the already too-cryptic story with it. Philip Chandler also vanishes from sight. Whether this is significant or not is never made clear. It's possible that his identity merges with that of Metal Man but to what purpose, and is it worthwhile, ditching the film's most charming character in the bargain? For as goes Chandler and his wry story-telling, so goes the film's sense of humor. And there I think, is Takacs' greatest problem — he takes himself too seriously. He begins to believe in his own artifice and tells us things we already know and/or about which we no longer care.

For instance, Metal Man encounters a high-school dropout (The Kid) in utterly confused rebellion against society. Hereby we explore alienation. Woe to those of us who seek new insights, it is the alienation of the 60's, when we first discovered we were alien-

ated, and which we should have abandoned for the more sophisticated angst of the 70's.

Moving right along... he meets Max the Promoter (a delight in spite of himself) who equates the electric guitar with power. So what else is new? The plot thickens.

If you're in for a bit of nastiness, meet Violet and the Children of Truth. Vi and co. perform on our poor manipulated hero (they put makeup on him and press a few buttons in a separate room) and turn him into — shades of anticlimax — a rock star. Yes Virginia, things could be worse.

Logically, this culminates in a rock concert. Metal Man becomes Messiah to an orgiastic group of punk-rockers and is crucified somewhere between bump and grind.

This is a daring scene and for the most part is handled extremely well. The lighting, the sound, the camera angles and the raw sexual energy combine to vividly conjure up a rock concert, lacking only one thing — a sense of audience, surely the crucial factor in any concert. A Rosy Crucifixion is the title of this episode and 'rosy' is indeed the killing factor. The crucifixion is altogether half-hearted at best. Oh, it's a hefty and striking image that massively imposing, heavy metal cross that is raised on stage. Powerful, you bet! But our Messiah is fastened so loosely to his perch and remains there so briefly as to be tantamount to a joke. Furthermore, the legendary martyrdom of rock stars is by now old hat. What could have been a potentially devastating scene becomes merely an act of little consequence followed by not much of a conclusion. He descends his cross in a flash, and the cycle begins again as another train enters the station. Nothing was sacri-

ficed, no one was saved. A pretty cheap price to pay for one of the hottest symbols around.

Takacs has done what many young filmmakers try to do — make a film that *says* something. He has also fallen prey to the temptation to touch all bases at once. Eager to sport his erudition, he attempts to show us all that he knows — an unnecessary occupation if there ever was one.

Takacs' film is undeniably well-made, consistently interesting (if not always satisfying), and crammed full of incredible images. The priority is on image. Theoretically, the meaning of a film should be clear from its images alone but in fact, there is little to support Takacs' pictorial dexterity. He has presented us, with *Metal Messiah*, a detailed but unruly outline of

a terrific idea without having thought through its implications or brought it to any meaningful conclusion. As a member of the audience I do not mind in the least *working with* a film — I do, however, mind anything half-digested.

Some distance is in order. As an artist Takacs is too undeveloped to be objective about himself but he would do well to practise a stricter regimen of self-criticism and learn to be aware of the moments when he has not given enough and of those wherein he has given too much.

Takacs has style, bravado and guts. I want to see his next film and hope it's as energetic as *Metal Messiah*. I also hope, and this sincerely, that he acquires some discipline in the interim.

posing for us. Given that the film is a memory-piece this can and may be part of the style and if so, my apologies — if only underneath the vogue-ish postures one could not read delight at dressing up and representing so much elegance.

The story itself is evocative of things almost attained and inexplicably lost. Recurring images of the two women as blue-uniformed schoolgirls wrestling tell us of an innocent sexuality that in adulthood becomes a subdued eroticism, gently evoked — the crook of a sleeping arm upon a silken sheet, a brocade bag reflected in highly polished wood, a cigarette gracefully held by slender fingers.

Their adult relationship is rendered tenuous by keeping action to a minimum — making it illustrative rather than demonstrative of the quiet, poignantly sad voice-over narrative, one woman's musings on their lost love and private despairs. Much of the film is still shots, simple actions repeated several times in succession, and choreographed sequences of glances. Considered use is also made of film tones to designate time and place.

Mary Stephen exhibits considerable adeptness at melting form and content. *Les choses délicates* are handled delicately, the pain of lingering sadness is treated with an admirable discretion. Visually, as a filmmaker, Mary Stephen is a winner. As a story-teller she is quietly skilled. It is a shame then to see such talent and potential squandered on reverent imitation. Flattery, in this case, serves only the ones on whom it is bestowed.

Thinking of Duras, at the close of *Ombres de Soie* one audience member sarcastically suggested that we retitle this one 'China Song'. Too reminiscent of styles developed some years ago, *Ombres de Soie* is a mannered film, the product of a well-behaved and dutiful child, a student who has learned her lessons too well. One feels that the director would throw her hands up in despair at the mere suggestion of spontaneity. But this is exactly what she most needs.

There is a place in film for Duras, Resnais, and company, and they have served us well in their fashion. However, I question the need for more of the same. We could, though, quite conceivably have need of a Mary Stephen *if* she is capable of fighting her way out from under the gloss of her mentors. □

Mary Stephen's OMBRES DE SOIE

d: Mary Stephen, ph. John Cressey, so. Jim Pogue, sc. Mary Stephen & Ann Martin, ed. Mary Stephen & Ann Martin, pr. John & Mary Productions, Paris/Montréal, 1977 colour, 62 min. Chinese with French subtitles.

Ombres de Soie is a film as elusive but not as seductive as its title. It is the story of two moneyed Oriental women, childhood friends who go their separate adult ways, maintaining sporadic contact, yet remain inextricably linked. One of them marries, the other dies, presumably suicide due to the marriage. The story is, in the best tradition of the French nouveau-roman, more suggested than actual, and takes place in a Marienbad-esque Shanghai.

If *Ombres de Soie* were a woman one could only call it 'stunning' — it would turn heads in the street and stop men in their tracks. It would not however render them gibbering fools nor even mildly weak-kneed. It has all the external trappings of inspiring womanhood but lacks the necessary vitality and soul to be truly beautiful.

Ombres de Soie is a film of rare and exquisite beauty. Each image is precisely chosen to convey specific moods
36/Cinema Canada

with not an iota of extraneous information. Not one inch of the screen ever betrays anything that could detract from the studied attractiveness of each image.

Studied is the key word. That Mary Stephen is enamored of Marguerite Duras, Alain Resnais, and their ilk is evident. She has taken great pains to imitate their finer modes — at the expense of her own creative impulses.

This is Mary Stephen's first film and it is a lovely thing to behold. She has put together a tight and meticulous artwork with scarcely a fault to it; a feat not to go unremarked in a film world that all too often condones sloppiness. *Mais — il manque quelque-chose* — as though she held herself back, timid of allowing her own inner visions to shine through.

Her images are striking, rich with color, and imbued with a highly refined sensitivity to design to which the viewer can but humbly bow. Having her husband John Cressey on camera is a definite asset — his photography is brilliant.

One only wishes that, having selected her décor and compositions with such care, Mary Stephen had been as meticulous in choosing and directing her actresses, since much of our sympathies for the story depend on their ability to make their presence *felt*, to lend power to their own images. Alas, the beauty of the two women is not matched by an adequate maturity or worldliness. On screen they are conscious of

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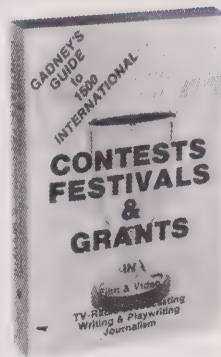
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BOOK REVIEWS

John Grierson — Film Master

by James Beveridge

Macmillan Publishing, NY,
361 pp., \$21.95.

When a rich person dies, there is often the sorry spectacle of relatives fighting over the jewelry and bits of furniture left behind. When a famous person dies, there is a similar tearing at the coat tails of the deceased in an effort to be pulled into immortality in the wake of the great man's reputation. This certainly has been the case after the death of John Grierson, pioneer of the idea of documentary film and founder of the National Film Board. One is faced with the sad sight of various second rate people scrambling to get into print for a piece of the Grierson action. In a way, I have always thought it was the old man's fault. Although he had a superb eye for talent, he was also, in his own quixotic way, quite authoritarian. Those who tended to stick with him became feeble reflections of his own image.

The book **John Grierson, Film Master** written by his friend and long time associate Jim Beveridge is a good example of the flaccid intellect that surrounded the great man. In a way it is a scandal, not because it is not interesting or not informative about the grizzly Scot who turned the film industry on its head. The problem is that it is simply not a book, but rather a loose collection of clippings — the unorganized droppings from somebody's bottom drawer. The bulk of the book consists of straight transcripts from interviews done for the National Film Board Film, **Grierson**, a film which in itself was so disorderly in conception that it had to be 'saved' by its editor and commentary writer. In his rush to get his name in print, Beveridge serves us these film interviews raw. They begin where they begin, wander through frequent irrelevancies and end where the film in the camera ran out — often

leaving you hanging. These interviews are sandwiched between chapter introductions and are individually introduced with brief factual backgrounds and frequently some silly anecdote of how the buzzing of the bees disturbed the soundman while the interview was being filmed. There is, of course, nothing wrong with the idea of using interviews to write a book. An excellent example is the recently published book by Elizabeth Sussex on British documentary which uses interviews in a very telling way. Unlike Beveridge, Sussex has a point to make and her raw material is finely worked into the thesis of the book. At \$22, Beveridge's grab bag is being promoted as a biography of Grierson. In fact, it is a sloppy, lazy effort, a non-book which is a disgrace to the memory of the man who changed the face of Canadian cinema.

There are almost fifty people interviewed in this book. Some, like actor Lorne Greene or Roberto Rossellini, are included not so much for any great knowledge they had of Grierson, but for their star value. Of all the interviewees, it was often the men behind the scenes who seemed to know Grierson the best and, among the trivia, this book contains some stunning insights into the workings of JG's mind. Laurence Henson worked with Grierson in the early sixties on the popular British television show, *This Wonderful World*.

Grierson was very proud of how this cultural show had achieved such high ratings and Henson describes Grierson's style as follows. "Grierson did an analysis of Reubens' compositions ... by showing a sequence of World Cup Football and explaining Reubens to the TV audience in terms of how Reubens played the corners of the rectangle of green like the football field. After that program, a man stopped him in the street and said in a heavy Scottish accent, 'You know Doc, that was fuckin' poetry.'"

Henson goes on to describe in a nutshell the Grierson I knew at McGill. "He was austere, he was capricious, he was funny. At times he could charm the birds out of the trees. He existed in an enormously complex manner. He demanded things, and when questioned,

wouldn't give answers, but would see your own reaction to what you had done. Without actually saying anything, he would be saying: 'There, you see, do you get it?' " According to Henson he had one message over and over again to all creative people and it is a message which has sadly gone unheeded by many of the artistes presently working for the Film Board. "If you had a dedication to something outside of yourself, you were in business; if you did not have a dedication to something outside of yourself then you had had it, and you ended by disappearing up your own arsehole." It was on such seat-of-the-pants philosophy that the documentary film movement was created.

Throughout his life, Grierson was not so much a "film master" as a teacher. He was the front man through whom others could exercise their own creativity. He taught through abrasion, Joris Ivens described his methods as follows: "When he saw a Communist, he quoted the Bible and when he saw Catholics, he quoted Lenin. Above all he taught that it was the job of the artist to create order from the chaos of information surrounding our daily lives.

What is particularly infuriating about **John Grierson, Film Master** is that in reading its 361 pages, you get a tremendous first-hand feeling from the large collection of people appearing in the book whose very different lives have been touched by this great media prophet. But as any journalist knows, spoken material needs a great deal of work to give it impact on the printed page. As a filmmaker, surely Beveridge would not subject his viewers to several hours of raw, unedited rushes. Reading the book, those who already know Grierson will make the considerable effort to piece this mish mash together. Those who did not know him will find here yet another book on documentary preaching to the converted and will wonder what all the fuss was about. But, in an odd way in reading Jim Beveridge's disordered collection, one cannot help but be inspired. The data is there and someday the book on John Grierson, film master is going to be written.

Ronald Blumer

Ronald Blumer, a frequent contributor to *Cinema Canada*, was John Grierson's Graduate Assistant when he taught at McGill University in 1969 and 1970.

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BOOKSHELF

by Georges L. George

Facets of Cinema

As Lawrence H. Suid argues in **Guts & Glory: The Great American War Movies**, most Hollywood examples of that genre (up to the Vietnam fiasco) projected a distinctly pro-war attitude attributable to the cooperation the Pentagon was only too eager to extend to film producers. His highly readable, fully documented and scholarly work draws material from interviews with filmmakers, technical advisers and top Army brass (Addison-Wesley \$12.95/6.95).

In **Film Is**, Stephen Dwoskin presents an extensive, well informed survey of "underground" cinema. Discussing filmmakers, films, and techniques, Dwoskin assesses the cultural and sociological nature of independent film production in an historic study that provides a valuable reference index on a highly personal art form (Overlook Press \$6.95).

Calling it "a mirror of American life," editors David Manning White and John Pendleton scrutinize in **Popular Culture**, the impact on public taste and lifestyle of mass entertainment, advertising, communication media and other opinion-molding efforts. A stimulating book, containing 57 articles by sociologists, educators, artists and critics (Publisher's, Del Mar, CA 92014; \$11.95/6.25).

Film historian Leonard Maltin reviews, in **The Great Movie Comedians**, the careers and distinctive characteristics of the many funny men and women, from Chaplin to Woody Allen, whose antics contributed significantly to the evolution of screen comedy (Crown \$10.95).

In an enlightening study of 23 celebrated directors from Antonioni to Welles, editors Leo Braudy and Morris Dickstein have assembled in **Great Film Directors** the views of filmmakers, writers and critics whose stimulating, and often clashing, interpretations provide insightful appraisals of directorial achievements (Oxford U. Press \$7.50).

Academy Award winning George L. George is a film director who does film book reviews in Canada, France and the U.S.

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Paul Michael, in **The Academy Awards: A Pictorial History**, commemorates fittingly the 50th anniversary of the event with an updated edition of his classical work. This is a large format volume, well documented and abundantly illustrated (Crown \$14.95).

In **The Cinema of Ernst Lubitsch**, Leland A. Poague undertakes successfully to bring out the underlying unity of style between the disparate themes of his films. Poague's auteurist approach synthesizes the motifs in Lubitsch's films, whether historic dramas, social satires or witty comedies, into a cohesive structural entity (Barnes \$12).

An outstanding biographical achievement, **Samuel Beckett** by Deirdre Bair evaluates a unique literary personality whose concern for all forms of writing extended to the movies. Beckett's script for *Film* shows his drive for complete control over his material, as he closely supervised director Alan Schneider's staging and his handling of Buster Keaton, the film's star. A truly remarkable book that perceptively analyzes the personality and style of a major writer (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich \$19.95).

Films In Print

A new edition of Michael Wilson's controversial screenplay, **Salt of the Earth** is re-issued with a pungent commentary by Deborah Silverton Rosenfelt. In it, she discusses with sympathetic understanding the background and history of the film's making, together with original data on the 1954 strike that provided the basis for the script (The Feminist Press, Box 344, Old Westbury, NY 11568; \$4.94).

An example of the way Hollywood studios used to deal with literary material is provided with the publication of **Three Comrades**, the original screenplay F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote in 1937 from Erich Maria Remarque's novel. The distorting changes injected by producer-director Joseph Mankiewicz and co-scripter Edward E. Paramore disclose the conformist attitude MGM expected from its writers (So. Illinois U. Press \$10/3.95).

In **Faulkner's Intruder in the Dust**, Regina K. Fadiman offers a critical analysis of the 1949 film based on the William Faulkner novel of racial conflict. Ben Maddow's script is reprinted as directed by Clarence Brown, offering Dr. Fadiman a solid basis for her informative study (U. of Tennessee Press \$13.50).

American humorist Jean Shepherd had adapted two of his popular novels in his script **The Phantom of the Open Hearth**. His down-to-earth good natured view of mid-America breathes life into a program that was widely shown on public television (Doubleday/Dolphin at \$4.95).

Steve Allen publishes **Meeting of Minds**, a series of literate scripts featuring delightfully anachronist confrontations between historic personages (Thomas Paine, Cleopatra, Attila the Hun, President Theodore Roosevelt, and others), six entertaining and educational programs that ran successfully on the Public Broadcasting Service (Crown \$10).

Constance Nash and Virginia Oakley offer aspiring film and television writers two authoritative manuals containing sound advice on the essential elements of planning, organizing, writing and selling a script. **The Screenwriter's Handbook** and **The Television Writer's Handbook** carry, as well, interviews with established professionals and excerpts from produced screen and teleplays (Harper & Row \$9.95 ea.).

Recent French Book

A most appealing autobiography, Simone Signoret's **La nostalgie n'est plus ce qu'elle était** is a warm, funny and exceedingly candid memoir. The actress evokes in frank detail her inquisitive youth in Paris, her political involvements, her love affairs, her marriage with Yves Montand and, above all, her remarkable career (Le Seuil 49 F.). An excellent translation, **Nostalgia Isn't What It Used to Be** is currently available (Harper & Row \$12.95).

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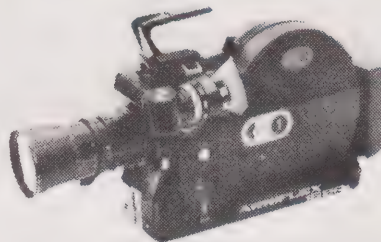
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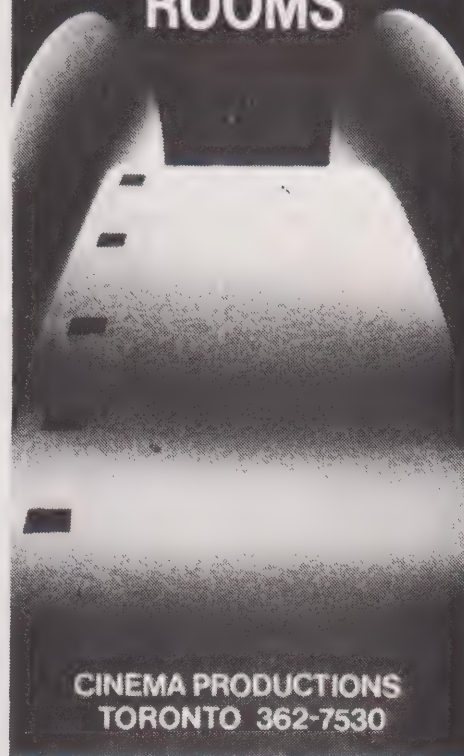
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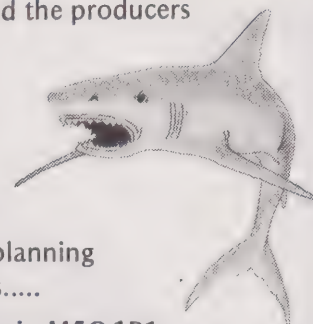
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FILM REVIEWS

Claude Chabrol's **VIOLETTE NOZIÈRE**

d. Claude Chabrol, asst. d. Philippe Delarbre and Brice Defer-Auboyneau, sc. Odile Barski and Claude Chabrol, ph. Jean Rabier, ed. Yves Langlois, sd. Patrick Rousseau, p. designer Jacques Brizzio, set dec. Robert Christides, cost. Pierre Nourry, l.p. Isabelle Huppert, Stephane Audran, Jean Carmet, J.-F. Garreaud, Lisa Langlois, Philippe Procot Guy Hoffman, Jean Dalmain, Bernadette Lafont, p. Eugène Lepicier, Denis Héroux, p. sup. Alain Fleury, p.c. Filmel -FR3-Cinevideo co-production. 1977, col. 35mm, running time 107 minutes, dist. Cinepix.



Chabrol with his arms around *Violette Nozière*'s stars Lisa Langlois and Isabelle Huppert

From the start of his career back in the late '50s, Claude Chabrol has seemed a far more conventional filmmaker than most of his colleagues who, collectively then, were known as the French New Wave. In comparison with Godard, Truffaut, Rivette, and Resnais, Chabrol showed little interest in innovative forms or unusual subjects. His early films lacked both the audacity of Truffaut and the intelligence of Godard and, for the most part, they remained firmly planted within the conventions of middle-class life. In this way, it was easy not to take Chabrol too seriously. He seemed just another filmmaker, making films in a traditional way about the tired conventions of the middle-class.

By the late '60s, however — by the time Chabrol had made *La Femme Infidèle*, *Que la Bête Meure* and *Le Boucher* — even his detractors had to admit that this most conventional of filmmakers was handling these conventions with exceptional authority. True, he was still making movies about middle-class life and was still concerned, in his Hitchcockian way, with the delineation of character and with the creation of suspense. There was a Langian dimension to his work as well — the sense that his characters were the helpless pawns of fate. They were all victims of their own conditioning, of the social repressions and

genteel expectations of their class.

As Chabrol's work increased in skill, it grew rich in texture. All the tiny details of all his characters' lives were so minutely observed and so persuasively presented that he came to be known, not entirely playfully, as the Balzac of the cinema. Now if Karl Marx could admire Balzac because his novels demonstrated the contradictions within bourgeois ideology, we might admire Chabrol in much the same way. In the best of Chabrol's films (for he has certainly made some clinkers)—supremely in the three films mentioned above—he exposes with loving detail and extraordinary nuance the repressed tensions in middle-class life that make all of our lives at least partially a lie. And since there is no bourgeois like a French bourgeois, Chabrol could turn out pictures of elegance and charm, both in their execution and in their subject-matter, which revealed to us the repressed emotions that all this elegance denies — negative emotions of jealousy, vengeance, sexual need, and hate. In all his films, these are the emotions which, bit by bit, break apart the apparently tidy complacency of his characters' lives.

Dealing with family life as he had done, Chabrol has been unique in the

prominence he has given to children—so often the justification of all the platitudes that hold family life together. But his children are rarely innocent. They often possess an insight, mute though it may be, into the falsities that their parents have long ago ceased to recognize. Yet there is an ambiguity in Chabrol about his children, sometimes wilfully indulged in. In *Que la Bête Meure*, was it really Charles, the man seeking vengeance, who killed Paul, the hateful father, or was it Paul's own son? In *Les Noces Rouges*, when the daughter writes to the police about her mother, is it innocently to clear her name or actually to turn her in? We can speculate about these matters but Chabrol makes it difficult for us to come to any confident conclusions.

In his latest film, *Violette Nozière* nominally, minimally, a Canadian French co-production—Chabrol has chosen for his source material an actual event which is studded with ambiguities. As the facts have been collected for us by the French journalist, Jean-Marie Fitère and shaped for the film by Odile Barski, *Violette* tells the story of a young woman in the '30s who lived a double life. School-girl and prostitute, a potential liberationist who was nevertheless capable of the most self-deceiv-

ing kind of romantic love, Violette tried to live her life as fully as she could. Obedient (if often sullen) when at home, she was outrageously audacious when out on her own. In her dealings with men, was she playfully teasing or sexually serious? Did she want to make money by selling her body or did she simply accept it when it was assumed to be required? Did she actually have syphilis (as the historical facts suggest that she did) or (in the film) was this just the kind of thing that men would say about her when frightened by her sexuality? Finally--a crucial question both for the actual Violette and for the film--did her parents know about her double life? There are hints that they did; but as in other Chabrol films in the best bourgeois tradition, nothing serious is ever talked about, nothing overt about life's passions can ever be said.

Violette gained notoriety by poisoning her parents, actually killing her father and bringing her mother to the point of death. In the France of 1933, there seemed no doubt about her guilt. Yet while sentenced to death, she was never guillotined. She served twenty-five years in prison; but at the end of the war, she was pardoned by Pétain and later eventually rehabilitated by the government of de Gaulle. Why was this? It is hard to say (and we can't expect the film to tell us!); but partly it was because over the years she had come to be seen as a heroine of her times. The surrealists adopted her as their archetypal heroine, a primordial existentialist, a character like they could only read about in the pages of de Sade. André Breton wrote about her; Magritte painted her; and Paul Eluard wrote a poem about her. They admired her because she fully acknowledged the unresolvable conflicts between the super-ego and the id, between the restrictions of society and the needs of passion. She not only acknowledged them, she acted them out in full.

Violette Nozière represents Chabrol at his finest. Working with much the same team as he has always worked with -- Jean Rabier as lighting cameraman, Pierre Jansen as composer, and Stéphane Audran as the mother--Chabrol has deftly crafted a film which is simultaneously exact and mysterious.

What we see are "the facts." We are denied explanations. The consoling comforts of motivation are nowhere in the film. We must find them for ourselves. Why do people do the things they have to do even when they know, rationally, that they will hurt other people? This is the question that Chabrol puts to us but denies us an answer.

As Violette Nozière, Isabelle Huppert has a far more active role to play than she had in **La Dentellière** (**The Lacemaker**); and an extraordinarily restrained performance as her cellmate, is given by Bernadette Lafont -- one of France's most underrated actresses. For those of us familiar with other films by Chabrol, many of the recurring elements are present in **Violette** -- particularly the site of the dinner table as the place around which the formal hypocrisies of middle-class life are most consistently enacted. Chabrol plays with this -- almost to the point of self-mockery. The night that Violette decides to poison her parents, she has them all dress up as if going to the opera and the table is laid with special care and festive candles--an elegance indeed appropriate to the seriousness of the occasion, as if for a wedding, a Christmas feast, or a funeral!

Violette Nozière is a film both to be enjoyed and reckoned with. In a recent interview, Isabelle Huppert suggested that, nowadays, Violette would probably be a terrorist. This gives us food for thought. She was a protester against the established norms of our not-too-satisfactory society. It is to the credit of Chabrol and one of the lasting values of the film that **Violette Nozière** not only presents us with the study of a woman but also of a set of social codes which prompted her to act as she did. Murderess or revolutionary? The film leaves that question for us to decide. For such a "conventional" filmmaker as Claude Chabrol, this is not the most conventional way of handling a piece of cinematic entertainment.

Peter Harcourt

Claude Chabrol's BLOOD RELATIVES

d. Claude Chabrol, asst. d. Justine Héroux, Brice Defer, Louise Arbique, sc. Claude Chabrol, adapt. Claude Chabrol's adaption of Ed McBain's novel **Blood Relatives**, ph. Jean Rabier, ed. Yves Langlois, sup. ed. Ian Webster, sd. Patrick Rousseau, a.d. Ann Pritchard, cost. Blanche Danièle Boileau, l.p. Donald Sutherland, Aude Landry, Lisa Langlois, Laurent Mallet, Micheline Lanctot, Stéphane Audran, Donald Pleasance, David Hemmings, Ian Ireland, Gregory Jianis, Tammy Tucker, Julie Anna, John King, Victor Knight, Tom Scurfield, Marguerite Lemir, Guy Hoffman, Howard Rychpan, Penelope Bahr, Nini Balogh, John Boylan, Terence Ross, Tim Henry, Winston McQuade, Jean LaBelle, Robert King, Victor Desy, Kevin Fenlon, Jerome Thiberghien, Jan Chamberlain, Richard Niquette, Lynda MacKay, Sony Forbes, exec. p. Julian Melzack, p. Denis Héroux and Eugène Lépicier, p. manager Claude Léger, p.c. A Classic -- Cinévideo -- Filmel co-production, 1977, col. 35mm, running time 90 minutes.

French director Claude Chabrol is slowly heading for Hollywood -- via Canada. Never fully appreciated in his homeland, Chabrol is finally branching out in an attempt to gain greater world recognition. Fortuitously, or not, depending on your viewpoint, he has crossed paths with Montreal producer Julian Melzack who is also experiencing growing pains. The meeting of these talents is **Blood Relatives**.

While infinitely better than **Tomorrow Never Comes**, another Melzack production, **Blood Relatives** is a disappointing Chabrol film. Had it been made by a Canadian director, it would be hailed as a masterpiece, or falling back on that hackneyed word, a "break-through." Still, a lesser Chabrol picture is much better than most of the gunk that American distributors pollute the box office with.

Blood Relatives, a dandy double-edged title, is another venture into a genre Chabrol has made very much his own: the 'why-dunnit.' Chabrol has always been keen on examining the personalities surrounding a murder, the ambience of the crime and all the pres-

suring elements that drive someone to commit murder. He is respected for rising above the crude simplicities of the 'who-dunnit'. His finesse, in addition to his skill in establishing mood, lies in the ability to reveal human behaviour, to bring understanding to an action that most would dismiss as irrational. His studies are not cold, clinical or detached but neither are they sentimental.

Unfortunately, with **Blood Relatives**, Chabrol brings elements of the 'who-dunnit' into the 'why-dunnit,' and the two don't gel. To comprehend the motives behind the crime, we must know the murderer but he keeps us guessing, or rather tries to, and the whys surrounding the crime become muddled, unclear.

One dark and stormy night a young girl (played by Aude Landry), her clothes torn and her hands bleeding profusely, bursts hysterically into a police station jabbering uncontrollably about the murder of her 17-year-old cousin Muriel. The two were returning home from a party when Muriel is sexually assaulted and brutally stabbed to death; Patricia escapes. Working with sketchy information Insp. Carella (Donald Sutherland) begins rounding up suspects.

But we are made privy to only one interrogation. Doniac, played by Donald Pleasance, looks like your typical middle-aged creton with a penchant for nubile girls. We know from the outset he's not our man. Yet the interplay between Pleasance and Sutherland is sharp. Chabrol uses the scene to show the greyer shades of moral questions. Upon checking out Doniac's alibi, Carella learns that nubile girls can be every bit as much victimizers as are middle-aged men. During the grilling, while Doniac professes innocence, Sutherland tries to keep his mounting anger in check but you can see the steam seeping from each spicurl adorning his head.

While Chabrol, doesn't take a firm moralistic stance, he comes awfully close in using Carella as his mouthpiece. When Patricia, in a surprise move, accuses her own brother Andrew of the murder, Carella consoles her by saying that even he would place the law above familial loyalties. The director avoids making any judgments when Carella learns of the relationship between the murdered girl and her cousin Andrew.



Chabrol on location for the shooting of **Blood Relatives** with Aude Landry, Laurent Malet, Lisa Langlois and Brice Defer

The pair, living in Andrew's home, became lovers. While he wanted to marry her, she rejected him because of the blood ties. Later she becomes involved with a married man, played by David Hemmings. Another questionable relationship, but Chabrol and Carella are silent.

Blood Relatives doesn't really work as a police thriller. Although Sutherland, reprising his low-keyed cop of **Klute**, is fairly good, the character as seen by the director is an ineffectual boob. Carella, outraged by the murder and fearful that it could happen to his own daughter, should be obsessed, driven to find the murderer — and it wasn't the butler — but Carella is nothing more than a functional character, a narrative device. The solution of the crime relies on chance, and not on solid police detection.

In fact, the crunch only comes after Carella learns of Muriel's diary, which is found in the garbage. Too convenient. Convenient, also, are the intimate details revealed in the diary. Young diarists, I think, tend to be more cryptic, embellishing unimportant events, noting fantasies and down playing significant matters. The frank honesty of the diary is, ironically, dishonest. It's an easy cop out.

Carella spends one night reading Muriel's life, learning what happened in her last days. (Here, Micheline Lanctot

a sadly misused actress, bounces in as Carella's wife.)

The diary's revelations come as a big surprise to Carella and the audience is supposed to react with comparable amazement, but throughout the film the viewer has been given more information than our Inspector has obtained. Next to Carella, Inspector Clouzeau is a veritable Sherlock Holmes.

Blood Relatives aspires to be both an absorbing psychological melodrama, and a thrilling murder mystery but it just doesn't wash. Carella comes to grips with the murderer in the closing moments and the reasons and motives are casually summed-up, almost dismissed with a 'so-what' off-handedness. The film fails as a tantalizing murder thriller in the Agatha Christie tradition because

Chabrol doesn't provide us with a wide selection of delectable suspects from which to pick and choose.

Much is made of the murder weapon, a vicious-looking butcher knife lifted from the home of Paul Gaddis, the boy who gave the party which Muriel and Patricia attended. Any good inspector worth his salt would have questioned Gaddis *toute suite*. But he doesn't appear in the film, because Chabrol for some unknown reason, has mercifully whittled down the suspect list.

Aside from Sutherland, the only other fine performance is given by Aude

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Landry, doing a nicely restrained version of the Bad Seed character. The other juvenile parts (Lise Langlois and Laurent Malet as the young lovers) are awkward and self-conscious with a kind of the look-at-me-Ma-I'm-in-the-movies quality to their acting. Stephen Audran (Mme. Chabrol) is badly dubbed and this discolours her entire performance in the film. And why was she dubbed in the first place? She has appeared in American films; **The Blackbird** and **Silver Bears** among them.

Chabrol, as usual, has created a wonderfully moody piece. The dank streets of Old Montreal are properly eerie and the feeling of gloom and doom is nicely captured by Jean Rabier's camera. Rabier is to Chabrol what Sven Nykvist is to Bergman: both make a perfect team. But in **Blood Relatives** the timing is off. Rabier sets the shot, but Chabrol fails to follow through with the volley. Atmosphere is everything to Chabrol but it doesn't add-up to a thrill.



It's all in the family in **Blood Relatives**

Zale Dalen's SKIP TRACER

d. Zale Dalen, asst. d. Tom Braidwood, sc. Zale Dalen, sc.. cont. Gayle Scott, ph. Ron Orioux, asst. ph. Chris Gallager, Jan Martel, ed. Zale Dalen, asst. ed. Vicki Duggan, sd. Richard Patton, m. Linton Garner, J. Douglas Dodd, cost. Mary Crawford, l.p. David Petersen, John Lazarus, Rudy Szabo, Allan Rose, Sue Astley, John Scott, Mike Grigg, p. Laara Dalen, assoc. p. Paul Tucker, p. manager Martin Walters, p.c. Highlight Productions Ltd. 1976, col. 16mm blown up to 35 mm, running time 90 minutes

Skip Tracer is such a briskly told, well-acted, engagingly shot genre exercise that one can almost ignore the puerile moral at its base. Almost.

John Collins (David Peterson) is the skip tracer, a loan company clerk, whose job is to hound and collect from delinquent borrowers. He is the model collector, who has devoted his life and every energy to his job. Now he is vying for his company's Man of 46/Cinema Canada

the Year award, for an unprecedented fourth year.

But time wounds all heels. The cold professional crust is beginning to crumble. The film anatomizes the costs of this kind of professional success.

The story-line is familiar enough, with its dramatization of the soul's chill by ambition and the dog-eat-dog (or vice versa) world of business. What distinguishes this film is the freshness of its Vancouver setting and the calibre of performance, which is generally much better than the script.

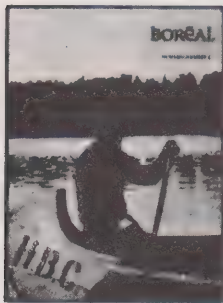
Especially effective is David Petersen, a Cardston, Alberta, native working with the Tamahnous Theatre Workshop, who makes his film debut as a soft-edged Widmark type.

The husband-and-wife director-producer team of Zale and Laara Dalen must be credited with a film that looks far classier than its \$145,000 budget would suggest. Since the setting doesn't strangle the film with its local habitation and a name, it should thrive wherever there is a market for a genre thriller.



Director Zale Dalen confers with lead Petersen

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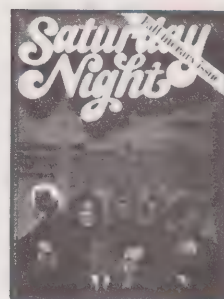
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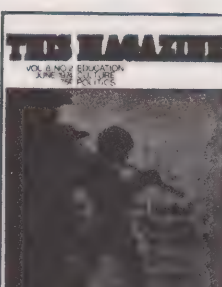
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The problem with the film is that its mind is not as good as its craft. Behind the whole story lies a moral hollow.

For the basic stance is that it is wrong for a man to enforce the repayment of debts. Collins' job requires that he make, and then recover loans; that this job should be considered innately villainous is stupid.

All kinds of problems grow out of this attitude in the film.

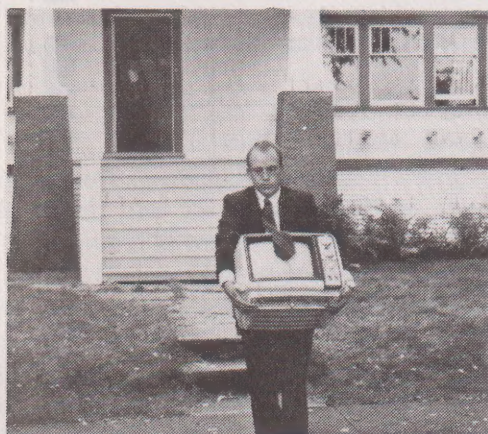
First, although Collins is supposed to be a callous sort of Shylock-Hitman, he is from the outset played as a rather honorable man. He tries to warn an old pensioner off his company's cut-throat terms, for example. And he spurns the sexual compromise offered by the wife of his most important account.

Second, his ostensible moral awakening begins under paradoxical conditions. The man who first advises him bravely to confront himself is a rather unattractive debtor who has himself been cowering in a sewer pipe. There is no honor in the hero's moral awakening.

Nor in his awakening. The film's climax has the hero screw his company by misinforming the computer that all his clients are deceased, their debts cancelled. He is to be applauded for shafting his company.

Now, it should be as wrong and as self-degrading to shaft a company as it is to shaft a person. Companies work for people. And it is the shafting that is wrong, not the nature of the shaftee.

This film requires us to sneer at the hero when he does his helpful job reasonably and well, and to applaud him when he defrauds his company



The skip tracer collecting

and gives his clients the chance to cheat.

Shades of *One on One* wherein the snotty puling hero exploits his athletic scholarship and is supposed to command our admiration when he walks out on it after finally making the team!

Maybe it's in the air. Maybe it's the dying gasp of the flower children, with a pistol-packin' flourish where a bit of logical ethics should be.

Were I a financier, I wouldn't hesitate to fund a feature film by the Dalens, as far as their arts and crafts are concerned. But I'd have to assume that the moral lapse is only a lull in the narrative logic, but a sign of some subversive bent.

Three minor elements locate the film in the noble tradition of American B-films. From the Western comes both the ambush of the hero, and the motif of the old hand training a young naif (the engaging John Lazarus here), while ardently warning him away from the life of specious glory. From the urban crime film comes the overall atmosphere of sweaty greed and manipulation, and the subplot of a debtor driven to suicide.

An efficient genre film like this provides the audience connection and the technical experience on a larger scale and with better results than do the host of glossy co-productions that have been visited upon us of late.

Maurice Yacowar

SHORT FILM REVIEWS

ANOTHER KIND OF MUSIC

d. Glen Salzman/Rebecca Yates, ph. Mark Irwin, sd. ed. Glen Salzman/Rebecca Yates, m. Ishan People, p. Glen Salzman/Rebecca Yates, p.c. Fruits and Roots, col. 16mm. running time 24 min. dist. International Telefilm.



Another Kind of Music is a straightforward (sometimes too much so) plea for tolerance. However, it is also more than this. It is positive in its approach to people and things, and it maintains that an open mind is a virtue because there are things of value in different lifestyles and cultures that can, and should, be enjoyed.

The plot concerns itself with two young, Toronto teenagers, one white and one black. Dave is a drummer who is tired of playing hard rock. After an argument with his closed-minded band members, he goes to a record shop

where he meets Tony who introduces him to reggae. From this point on, the plot becomes fairly predictable. Dave's friends do not like Tony and Tony's friends do not like Dave. After a certain amount of emotional upheaval on both sides, the film ends happily.

Most of the film suffers from obvious artifice. The major flaw is the uniformly poor acting. I assume everyone in-

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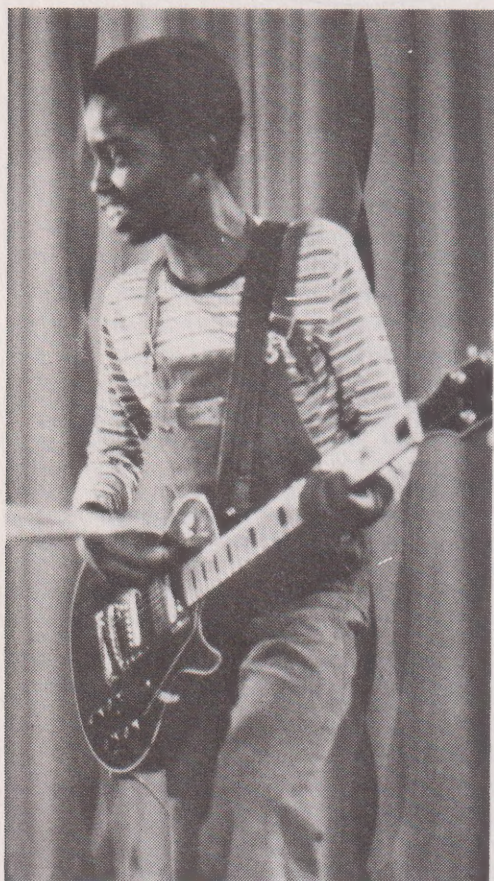
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FILM REVIEWS

volved is an amateur actor. The roles all suffer from the earnestness and sincerity that invariably accompanies non-professionals; everyone tries so terribly hard to be good. Consequently, the characters distance themselves from the viewer.

The indoor locations also distance the viewer. Dave and Tony live in homes which are too middle class, too neat



and too shiny to be believed. Their parents are of the all knowing, all understanding 'father-knows-best' school.

The photography and editing are quite skillfull. Mark Irwin has a good eye for color and composition. The music, hard rock and reggae, is enjoyable.

Another Kind of Music is not a bad film; it has a serious purpose and is relevent and valuable in the light of increasing racial tension in Toronto. In spite of the somewhat clichéd plot, the film is interesting and the poor acting does not seriously interfere with enjoying the film. It is, for the most part professionally done.

Another Kind of Music's spirit and intentions more than overcome its flaws.

Sheila Patterson

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